THERE IS A TIDE

J. C. SNAITH

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By J. C. SNAITH

THERE IS A TIDE
ARAMINTA
THE VAN ROON
THE COUNCIL OF SEVEN
THE ADVENTUROUS LADY
THE UNDEFEATED
THE SAILOR
THE TIME SPIRIT
THE COMING
ANNE FEVERSHAM

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
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BY

J. C. SNAITH

AUTHOR OF "THE VAN ROON," "THE SAILOR,"
"THE UNDEFEATED," ETC.

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I

SO this was England.

A slight, pretty girl, in a corner seat of the boat express, was looking out of the window. To her everything was new and odd and a face curiously expressive was quick to register its emotions.

All was on a scale so much less than the land from which she had come. The neatly parcelled acres somehow reminded her of Noah's ark. Farmsteads trim and tiny; amusing hedgerows; the cattle and horses in the fields; the comic little villages, each with its moss-grown church tower peering through the damp mist, were so expected and yet so unnatural to the eye of a stranger that it was rather like a scene in a play.

The girl was in the compartment alone. By her side was a "grip," cheap looking, battered, with an air of travel; in the rack, above her head, was its fellow with a mackintosh and an umbrella. Like their owner, these articles had a subtle air of the second rate. Yet the girl herself, had she known how to wear her clothes, which were not bad of their kind, had certain points that seemed to promise a way out.

For one thing, she was alive. Grey eyes, shrewd, keen and clear, looking out from under the brim of a

hat that had a touch of smartness, seemed to absorb every detail of this film reeled off at the rate of sixty miles an hour. It was like the movies, but less exciting. Not that the traveller craved excitement. This trip to an unknown land was far from being a pleasure jaunt.

So intent were the grey eyes in absorbing a scene which was a good deal below expectation, that they were not content with the window against which her elbow pressed. Now and then they roved to the left across the narrow corridor, for a glimpse of the more distant view. Broadly speaking, this, too, was a wash-out. The mist, clammy and all-pervading, might have a lot to do with the general effect, but England, so far, was nothing to write home about.

Disappointment already loomed in a receptive mind, when a man appeared in the corridor. He gazed through the glass at the compartment's sole occupant; then he came in and closed the door carefully. With a quiet air he took a corner seat immediately facing the girl. She had a feeling that she had seen him before; but where or in what circumstances she could not say. Indeed, so vague was her memory that she soon decided it was a mere reaction to the man's striking personality.

He was not a man to forget. Big, handsome, muscular, clean and trim, he had all the snap of the smart New Yorker. Evidently he went to good tailors and he paid for dressing.

He raised his ten-dollar Stetson with an air of class. "Miss Durrance!"

The girl gave a start and coloured hotly.

"Don't remember me, eh, Miss Durrance?"

It was clear that she didn't. But he remembered her, and the calm enforcement of his knowledge in a tone near the familiar flecked the girl's cheek with a picturesque confusion.

"Can't say I do."

At the awkward answer his eyes twinkled into a slow, bright smile. "Myself, I never forget a face or a name."

The voice sounded oddly familiar, but she could not recall it. Not able to place this man, the effort to do so teased her forehead into a frown.

"My job, you see, to remember folks."

She half resented the cool laugh. "Not sure I want to remember everybody."

"I'll say not. Pikers good and plenty don't want to remember me." His tone was jocular, but there was something in it beyond mere banter.

Mame Durrance realised suddenly that she had taken a strong dislike to the man opposite. He realised it, too. The breadth of his smile became aggressive. As her eyes met it they received a challenge which they were too proud to accept. She withdrew them quickly and looked ostentatiously away through the carriage window.

Even the English scene, as much as was visible, could not divert her mind from a gentle snigger that stole upon her ear. Whoever this man was she hoped he would go. But he showed not a sign. Settling into the opposite corner, he sprawled his long legs,

brushing her knees as he did so, and finally crossed them. And then, past master of the art of making himself offensive, he began to hum softly, but in a way to keep in the middle of her consciousness.

"Miss Durrance." The voice was mild but half a sneer was in it.

Somehow "it got her goat" to have his conversation thrust upon her after she had taken pains to let him know that she had no use for it. Anger made her eyes sparkle. "You quit," she said. "Beat it."

Rude, certainly, but she meant it to be. But in that art, too, he had nothing to learn. "Now, then, Miss Durrance, come off it." His laugh was hateful.

One outstanding detail of the compartment there was, which the sharp-eyed traveller had already noted. A metal disc fixed below the luggage rack was within reach. It was adorned by the words, "To communicate with the Attendant, pull the handle."

On the spur of the moment she half turned and raised her hand. But the voice of the man opposite grew instantly so full of menace that she felt a little frightened.

"Can that, Miss Durrance, or I'll have to make it hot for you."

II

THE force of the threat made the girl withdraw her hand. She met the laugh which followed with a look of defiance, but she had not art nor cleverness enough to conceal the fact that she was rattled. Her cheeks grew scarlet. Some very white and even teeth bit savagely into her lower lip.

The man, watching narrowly, was obviously pleased with the effect.

"Got me now, hey, Miss Durrance?"

"I don't know who you are," was the answer of Miss Durrance. A brave and steady answer it was. "And I don't want to know anyway."

The look in the girl's eyes, the note in her voice, appeared sharply to recall the man opposite to a sense of his position. After all, it would not do to carry the thing too far. It was as if he suddenly remembered that in an especial degree he was a guardian of the public interest. When he spoke again his voice had consideration, even a certain kindness.

"I'm one of Tillotson's men."

Already her startled mind had flown to that conclusion. But neither the man's change of tone nor her own insight softened the steely hostility of her eyes. She lifted a fighting chin to rake him with a glance of

grey fire. "I'm a very respectable girl." The note was deeper than she had touched yet. "I don't know you an' I don't want to know you. Cops are no class anyway."

Detective Addelsee, an eminent member of a highly specialised calling, was a long way from being a fool. He was growing a bit annoyed with himself for his lack of diplomacy. In spite of the girl's insolence there was something about her that he respected. And, what was just as important, he respected human nature.

He decided to remove the bad impression he had made. "Got in wrong in New York, hey? Over here, ain't you, to try and change the luck?" His voice was honey now. Its only reward was grim silence.

"Know folks this side?"

The girl looked at Detective Addelsee as if he were dirt. She curled her lip and shook a scornful head.

"Then you better watch your step. London crawls with slick ducks. All sorts, all nations. Up to every game. A bad place, London."

"If it's worsen New York, it must be," conceded Miss Durrance.

"Capital of a free country. Every kind of cag-handed dago lies around loose in London. No place for a lone girl. What's the stuff you goin' to pull?"

"That's my affair."

Detective Addelsee smiled. He had caught a tartar. But he secretly liked the way she gave it him back. Sand always appealed to him.

"Well, I wish you the best, Miss Durrance." The

voice was official, yet kindness came uppermost. "We've nothing against you in New York; but we might have had. You got in with a crooked push. Sorry to have to run you in, but findin' you on the premises and callin' yourself the old Haunt's secretary—she done two goes of time already—how was *we* to know *you* were on the level?"

Detective Addelsee meant well, but this display of tact hardly met the case. The grey eyes looked straight through him. He laughed. Serve him right for being clumsy. A regular little hell cat, but he admired her. Most girls of her kind would have been scared to death; he half suspected Miss Durrance was; but she would have died sooner than let him know it.

He liked the cut of her so much that he felt he must try to improve the acquaintance or at least to soften a bad impression. It was a shame to rag her, because to the expert eye she had a look of being up against it. But her pride, her grit, lured him on.

"What you goin' into, Miss Durrance, in this bum island? The movies?"

"No, I ain't, Fatty Arbuckle."

The answer was pat as your hat. Detective Addelsee chuckled.

"Make good on the fillum, a girl of your looks and style."

She eyed him with cool scorn from under the brim of her hat. "What's a cheap guy like you know about looks and style?"

Her drawl could only have come from one place on

earth, yet each little word had a kick in it quick and vicious, as if from the hind leg of a mule. Detective Addelsee felt this live child of the Middle West had had old Ned for a sire.

He decided now that only one course would be safe. That course was silence. But he had not been so amused in years. The trained professional memory at once recalled the circumstance of their previous meeting. During a raid on the apartment of an old harpy in the neighbourhood of Madison Avenue, who mingled crystal-gazing and fortune-telling with other illegal practices, this girl had been found seated at a typewriter. Investigation proved, however, that she had only held her job a fortnight, and that in the first place her association with such a dangerous person was due to an advertisement she had incautiously answered. Mame Durrance had no difficulty in satisfying the police that she was in total ignorance of the character and history of the notorious Cassandra, alias Zeno, alias Madame Bretsky. All the same the law took pains to impress on the unlucky stenographer that her escape had been narrow. In future she must be more discreet. Innocence as great as hers was apt to incur heavy penalties in such a city as New York.

This episode, as Detective Addelsee was shrewd enough to suspect, had shaken Miss Durrance to her foundations. She was undoubtedly a very respectable girl, the daughter of a simple Iowa farmer, and she had come East to try her luck. Having made a bad break at the start of her career she had decided to seek

fortune elsewhere. As William R. Addelsee sat gazing at that fighting profile out of the corner of his left eye, all that he knew about the girl passed in review order through a well-regulated mind. His had been the job of running her in; and of setting her free with a caution. He had caught sight of her again as she left the second-class deck of the *Sidonia;* he had seen her board the London train. She had the sort of personality not easy to forget. He was interested in this girl for her own sake; but the effort to get into conversation was having no success. The plain truth was, that as far as Miss Durrance was concerned William R. Addelsee was in the discard.

Man of the world, he was amused by her attitude. And he admired her grit. Moreover, he wished her well. That, however, was not easy to convey.

He tried the dulcet and disarming. "You see, Miss Durrance, there's a bunch of jewel thieves I'm lookin' for. Scotland Yard has rounded up several. I expect we'll soon fix the hull circus."

Miss Durrance, with glacial eye, continued to gaze upon the English scene. "The frozen mit" with a vengeance. Jewel thieves, Scotland Yard, even the brightest of Tillotson's Agency, haloed with romance for a normal girl, were cutting no ice for the moment. Her pride had been wounded and Detective Addelsee had now to foot the bill.

"You can quit." A fierce eye pinned him like an arrow. "Cops don't interest me nothing."

Silence again. The position was a little humiliating

for a man of the world. But this charming spitfire intrigued him. Such a you-be-damnedness quite took the fancy of William R. And the simple independence touched his sense of chivalry.

"If I can help you any I'll be glad," he said, humble as pie, yet adroitly raising a hand to hide the laugh in his eyes.

Said Miss Spitfire: "You can beat it. That'll help me considerable."

The entrance at this moment of a very small and very polite boy in a strangely bright and extremely tight suit of livery was most opportune. Miss Durrance, who had a fixed determination to see, mark and learn as much as she could in the shortest time possible, was taken at once by this new kind of "bell-hop."

"Corfee, miss?"

The fair traveller ordered coffee.

Under cover of this diversion William R. suddenly rose. It was the best chance he was likely to get of extricating himself with any sort of dignity from a position which every second grew worse. Nothing doing with this girl, and it was hardly fair to bait her.

As Detective Addelsee, on the heels of the departing boy, moved towards the corridor, he was guilty of one more false step. For he looked back and said: "Good-bye, Miss Durrance, an' good luck. Be careful this time to get in on the level. But I'll say London is a tough burg. If any time I can help you any, my name's Addelsee." He had the temerity to open a gold cigar case and produce his card. "Scotland Yard, White-

hall, 'll get me pro tem." As concrete evidence of good will, Detective Addelsee had the further temerity to write his address upon the card and then with a bland smile to hand it to Miss Durrance.

It was asking for trouble. William R. Addelsee duly received a full ration. Miss Durrance tore the card across. Then she coolly lowered the window and flung out the pieces. "Beat it." Her face was crimson, her eye ruthless. "And thank you for nix. Cops are no class at all, cops aren't."

With a little sigh that was offset by a humorous eye, Detective Addelsee raised the ten-dollar Stetson and followed the bell-boy along the corridor.

III

"SAY, Jackie Coogan, there's no sugar."

The polite boy in the button suit gazed at Miss Durrance with mild surprise. New stars constantly swam into his ken. Few had better opportunities than he of testing the simple truth that all sorts of people are needed to make a world. It was this, no doubt, which gave depth to his character. Nothing could have exceeded the grace of his regret for the sugar's omission and of his promise to bring some.

"That kid's fierce," was the mental comment of the traveller to the English scene as this by-product gently closed the door upon her. She had a very keen and lively sense of things and the air and manner of the button suit's wearer gave it a jolt.

Mame Durrance had certain preconceived ideas about the land she had come to and the odd folks who peopled it, derived in the main from exquisitely humorous writers, usually with Irish names, in her favourite magazines. The British, if not given to mirth themselves, were yet the cause of mirth in others. An obvious back number, the land of George Washington's forebears was a mass of weary pomposities; it took itself so seriously that it couldn't raise a smile to save its soul. Up till now she had not had much opportu-

nity of judging it, but the funny little toy of a train in which she was puffing along to London, the tame scenery—what she could see of it—through which it passed, the little cubbyhole in which she sat alone, and the comic child with oiled hair and the manner of a senator who ministered to her wants, all seemed to fit neatly into the theory.

Buttons came back with two small pieces of sugar on a large tray.

"Say, son, does it hurt you any to look that way?"

"Beg your pardon, moddam?"

"All right, Mr. Asquith. On'y my ignorance. You can beat it."

"Thank you, moddam." Gently and gravely, without a ghost of a smile, the polite child went.

It was well for Mame Durrance that she had these resources within herself. For at the moment she was not on good terms with life. The railway company's *café au lait,* for which it had the nerve to charge a quarter, allowing for the rate of exchange, was not very stimulating either. And Detective Addelsee had shaken her considerably. It surely looked as if the bad luck which had dogged her ever since she left Cowbarn, Iowa, six months ago was going to cling.

It was just six months ago that Mame Durrance had heard the call of ambition in rather strange circumstances. At that time she was a stenographer, earning a few dollars a week, in the office of the Cowbarn *Independent.* But her Aunt Lou, a sister of her

long dead mother, having left her a legacy of two thousand dollars, she at once turned her face east.

These providential dollars must be invested in seeing life. And as native wit had carried her already from a farm kitchen to a stenographer's chair, she saw no reason why, with money in her purse, that priceless quality should not take her much further. Anyhow it should not be for lack of trying.

She would see life. And in moments of optimism, of which at the start she had many, she went on to describe what she saw. The seeing, alas, proved easier than the writing; or rather the seeing and the writing were easier than to persuade editors "to fall" for her copy. Too many were at the game in the bright city of New York: wisenheimers of both sexes, who instead of coming via Poppa's pig-farm had been through College.

There was the rub. At Cowbarn the folks didn't set much store by College. But New York was different.

She was a shrewd girl and it did not take long for her to realise that she was some way behind the game. Human nature was always human nature, when you came down to cases, but there was no denying that she lacked experience. Back of everything was faith in herself, but so wide was the gulf between Cowbarn, Iowa, and the banks of the Hudson that no amount of faith could bridge it.

New York had laughed at her, scorned her, humiliated her deeply and cruelly in more ways than one. She

had been advised by newspaper men and also by police officers, professing a disinterested care for rustic ignorance playing a lone hand, to go back to dad and the pigs. These experts were confident that Miss Mame Durrance would get no good of New York.

However, they didn't know quite so much about Mame Durrance as she knew about herself. She might be down but she was not out. New York had no use for her, but there were other places on the map. For instance, there was London. No, not London, Ontario. As far as the big stuff was concerned, that burg was in the Cowbarn class. London, England, was the spot. She heard that London, England, offered scope for ambition. A few years in Europe might even stop the gaps in her education. It would be like putting herself through College. Hers was a forward-looking mind. And as with set lips and ten fingers on a purse, which in spite of Aunt Lou's legacy, was not so heavy as her heart, she put off in the *Sidonia,* she determinedly envisaged the future return of Mame Durrance to the land of her fathers with at least three trunks of real Paris frocks and an English accent. New York would laugh then at the little mucker on the other side of its mouth.

Conflicting opinions had been expressed to Miss Durrance about London. But in her small circle only one was able to speak from first-hand knowledge. Paula Wyse Ling had been there. The others spoke from hearsay, and in one or two cases with a little help from the imagination. But Paula Ling had lived

in London a year. This rising columnist, who in the view of Mame was "the goods," had taken pains to impress the traveller with the stark truth that in the Strand ten cents went no further than they did on Broadway.

Miss Ling had provided the adventurous Mame with the address of a cheap but respectable boarding house in Bloomsbury, where she had stayed herself, where, all things considered, she had received value for her money, and could conscientiously recommend. This enterprising girl had also given the traveller a letter of introduction to the editor of *High Life,* a weekly journal with an address in Fleet Street, whose ostensible business was to record the doings and sayings of Society with a large S.

As the train sped on the practical Mame began to arrange certain things in her mind. First she opened the small bag which was attached to her wrist, to make sure that the sinews of war were really there; and then, in spite of having made all sorts of calculations already, she did one more sum in her head to find out just how far Aunt Lou's legacy would carry her. Then she searched for the address of Miss Ling's boarding house and found it written on an envelope: Beau Sejour, 56 Carvell Street, Bloomsbury, London, W. C. Sole Proprietress Miss Aimee Valance. Terms *en pension.*

Somehow the information in its fulness and dignity was quite reassuring. Next the pilgrim reverently fingered the sealed envelope which bore the address: Walter Waterson, Esq., c/o *High Life,* 9 Tun Court,

Fleet Street, London, E. C. That was reassuring too. Finally she took in her fingers her own private card and they thrilled as she did so.

Her own private card, which had been engraved just before she had sailed in the *Sidonia,* had a cosmopolitan air. The world was going to be impressed by it.

MISS AMETHYST DU RANCE

New York City, U. S. A.

European Correspondent

Cowbarn *Independent*

The good old *Independent* looked quite class tucked away in the left-hand corner. But it would have raised a sure smile in New York. That city of four-flushers had taken a lot of pains to impress upon her that Cowbarn, Iowa, was at best a one-horse burg. Perhaps London might not be quite so good at geography. And it might not be quite so set up with itself, although as far as Miss Durrance could learn that was a subject upon which opinion varied.

However, there it was. European Correspondent, Cowbarn *Independent.* At the sight of the magic words the thoughts of Mame Durrance went rather wistfully back to the hard and dull and uncomfortable place in which she had been born and reared. After all it was home. And even if she was ready to die

rather than go back to live there for keeps, it was nothing to be ashamed of, for there was no place like it.

The card looked so well in the hand of Mame that she decided to mail one as soon as she reached London, to Elmer P. Dobree, the young and aspiring editor of the Cowbarn *Independent*. Good old Elmer P.! It would simply tickle him to pieces. But it would show him the stuff she was made of. He had tried to dissuade her from quitting the safe anchorage of her stool in the *Independent* office, and when unable to do so, like the sport he was, had told her to send along a weekly letter of New York news, and if able to print it he would pay the top rate of four dollars a thousand words. The Cowbarn *Independent* was an influential journal, but it had never paid President Harding more than four dollars a thousand words.

Mame took the editor at his word. Sometimes her stuff was printed. Sometimes it wasn't. But Elmer P.'s kindly interest in her had continued. She had been encouraged to let him know that she was going to Europe and that it would help her considerably if she could depend on his keeping a corner for her London Impressions which she would mail every Friday. Elmer P., before all things the man of affairs and the cautious editor, would not be drawn into a rash promise, but he would do his best. To this end he gave a bit of advice. Let her see to it that the doggone Britishers didn't take the pep out of her style.

So far Miss Durrance had not realised that she had a style. Anyhow she had never aspired to one. She

set down what she saw and heard and read in words that came just naturally. And she had a kind of hunch that the slick-a-lick New Yorkers always found something funny in the way those words came.

The Northwestern express steamed at last into Euston and Mame found herself up against the raw reality of London. From Crewe on the fog had been getting more and more business-like. By the time the metropolis was reached a very fair imitation of a "London particular" was on the platform to receive her. It was almost the famous "pea-soup" variety, but not quite, which was just as well for Miss Durrance. All traffic would have been at a standstill had she been greeted by that luxury and the troubles of a stranger in a land of strangers increased a hundred-fold. Even as it was, for one used to clear skies the fog was pretty thick, yet the seasoned Cockney would have described it as not a bad day for the time of year.

A Cockney of that genus, in the person of a luggage porter, opened the carriage door. He took charge of Miss Durrance's gear; also he took charge of Miss Durrance. Slow he was, very slow, to her way of thinking. As yet the alert traveller had not got the tempo of this nation of mossbacks; but the porter, if not exactly an Ariel, was sure as a rock. An earthquake or a landslide would not have hurried him and Mame had the wisdom not to try.

He got her trunk out of the van and put it on a taxi. She gave the address, 56 Carvell Street, Bloomsbury, in a tone of crisp importance; the taximan, who vied with

the porter in deference, touched his cap and off they trundled into the fog. For London it was really nothing to speak of, but the acrid vapour caused the eyes of Mame to sting and her throat to tickle; and the combination of raw air, grimy buildings, and an endless mud-churning sea of vehicles, slow-moving and enormous in their bulk and mass, somehow filled her with an odd depression.

In spite of all checks to progress it was not long before they reached Carvell Street. The taxi stopped at 56. Mame sprang out and boldly attacked six bleak stone steps, at the top of which was a door in sore need of paint. Her ring was answered by a comic sort of hired girl, with cap and apron complete. When Mame asked if she might see Miss Valance she was very politely invited to come in.

As Mame went in she made a mental note that her first impression must record the civility of these Londoners. Somehow it had a quality riper and mellower than any brand she had met with on her native continent. Whether it came from the heart or was merely a part of the day's work of a people addicted to "frills" or just a candid admission of the superiority of the race to which Mame herself belonged, must be left to the future to determine; but so far the critic was pleased with the universal Cockney politeness and she hoped it would pan out as good as it seemed.

The observer had not time to do justice to the small gas-heated anteroom into which she was shown before she was joined by the lady of the house. Miss Valance

was a replica of all the Cockney landladies that ever were. Thin, angular, severe, a false front and an invincible red tip to a freely powdered nose masked immense reserves of grim respectability. In the view of Miss Durrance she was "a regular he-one." All the same the pilgrim declined to be impressed by Miss Valance. It was part of her creed to be impressed by nothing that wore skirts. But had an exception been allowed to this article of faith Miss Valance would sure have put one over on her.

A disappointment was in store. Beau Sejour was full. Miss Valance was awfully sorry but she had no vacancy. This was a blow. Mame's experience, brief though it was, had been chequered; and she had duly impressed upon herself that if she adventured as far as London, England, she must keep her eyes skinned, for like every cosmopolitan city it was a natural home of the crook. Therefore she informed Miss Valance that she was a very respectable girl and wasn't going to take a chance on any old boarding house.

From the peak of her own respectability the châtelaine of Beau Sejour applauded Mame's wisdom. She was helpful besides. Round the corner in Montacute Square was an establishment she could recommend. It was called Fotheringay House and was kept by a lady of the name of Toogood and Miss Valance had heard her well spoken of. She might have a room to let. Anyhow there would be no harm in trying Mrs. Toogood.

Mame felt let down. It was clear from the manner

of Miss Valance that she was not very hopeful that the worthy Mrs. Toogood would be able to take her in. However, Mame warmly thanked Miss Valance for her helpfulness; and then buttoning up her coat she made a resolute dive through a passage dark and narrow towards the foggy street.

In the very act of doing so, a pang keen as the blade of a knife drove through Mame. Her luggage! All she had in the world had been left outside in the taxi. The villainous looking guy who had fawned on her with a wolf's smile as he had taken her trunk, her grip, her mackintosh, her umbrella and herself aboard his machine, had only to trundle away into the fog and she would be left high and dry with the clothes she stood up in. So sharp was the thought that Mame nearly groaned aloud. A fool trick to take a chance of that kind in a foreign city.

Coming over in the *Sidonia* she had read in the New York *Herald* of a girl who had just arrived in Paris having done what she had just done; and the girl had never seen her luggage again. And here was Mame Durrance, fed to the teeth with wise resolutions, walking into a trap with open eyes!

However, the taxi stood by the kerb just as she had left it, with her box strapped on to the front. Twopences were being registered by the meter at an alarming rate while the driver was placidly dozing. But the relief of Miss Durrance was considerable as she jumped in, after ordering Jehu, who was much less of a bandit

than he looked, to trek round the corner into Montacute Square as far as Fotheringay House.

La pension Toogood was curiously like Beau Sejour, except that it had five stone steps instead of six and that one of its area railings was missing. For the rest it was able to muster a similar air of tired respectability. Painted over the fanlight of the front door, in letters that once had been white, was the historical name Fotheringay House, yet even this did not cause the mansion to look inspiring. But Mame, obsessed by the knowledge that she was literally burning money, did not pause to study details.

As she sprang out of the taxi and ran up the steps of Fotheringay House she hoped that this time she would meet better luck.

A hired girl, the twin in every detail of the slave of Beau Sejour, opened the door. Miss Durrance was in a hurry, but she could not help being amused and interested. It was her attitude to life to be amused and interested; but then who would not have been with such an apron and such a cap, with such prim politeness, with such a way of speaking? Evidently the Britishers had standardised the hired girl. She might have been a flivver or a motor cycle.

The theory applied with equal force to the London landlady. Mrs. Toogood was Miss Valance over again. But if anything, she was raised to a slightly higher power. The same dignity, the same wariness, the same ironclad gentility; but she was a widow with two children, whereas Miss Valance was a spinster with none.

Her attributes, therefore, were fuller and firmer, a little more clearly defined. Mame did not make the comparison, but it was the difference between the Barbizon school and Picasso or Augustus John.

With the taxi outside ticking off twopences with quiet fury Mame felt she was getting down to the real meaning of her favourite maxim, Time is Money. She cut out, therefore, all preliminaries. Without troubling to remark that it was a nice day, as for London it was no doubt, she began in a tone of strict business, spot cash only. "Say, ma'am, can you let me a hall bedroom?"

From the chill mountain height of her disdain the landlady gave Mame a once-over. No matter what the case with her visitor she was in no hurry. The châtelaine of Fotheringay House had never heard of a hall bedroom. Her icy gaze travelled from Mame's rather crushed hat via her seal plush coat to her tarnished rubbers with a quietly stiffening reserve. Clearly a foreigner. Picturesque creatures no doubt. The late Mr. Toogood was partial to them, but he, though of pure English blood, was of a romantic mind and an Italian warehouseman. His widow preferred to order her life on the sound old plan of giving a wide berth to aliens.

Christian people never knew quite where they were with aliens. Some of them paid, some of them didn't. Mrs. Toogood's experience had been mainly among the latter. And in her view, this sharp-eyed slip of a girl who asked for something outlandish in an accent

you could cut with a knife, had the look and air of the didn't.

It might have been racial prejudice, but that was the landlady's feeling.

"From the Isle of Man, I presume," said Mrs. Toogood loftily. Although she was the widow of an Italian warehouseman she was not in the least imaginative. The Isle of Man was her Ultima Thule, the farthest eagle flight of which her mind was capable.

Mame knew as much about the Isle of Man as the landlady knew about a hall bedroom. But she smiled broadly.

"I'm from New York." Her voice went up a little as she made that damaging admission. For the admission *was* damaging.

"That would be America, would it not?" The growing gloom of the landlady began to verge upon melancholia.

Mame allowed that it would be.

The landlady sniffed. Mame knew by that sniff that the home of her fathers was in the discard.

Mrs. Toogood, if not a travelled woman, or a widely read or highly informed, was yet an educated one. She had been educated by the movies. That form of hyperculture which aims to instruct as well as to amuse and delights to draw together the nations of the earth had put this good lady wise on the subject of America.

Every Saturday afternoon it was the custom of a modern and progressive mother to take her twin sons, ætat. nine years and two months, Horatio Nelson Too-

good and Victor Emanuel Toogood by name—the Italian warehouseman had insisted on the Victor Emanuel in honour of his calling—to the Britannia Picture Palace in the Euston Road. In that centre of light they had learned that America was not quite what she gave herself out to be. God's Own Country was a truly wicked place. The crook, the vamp, the dope-fiend, the cattle-rustler, the bootlegger, the forger, the slick duck, the run amok quick shooter, the holder-up of mails was as thick on the floor of those United States as the white and yellow crocus in a Thames meadow in the middle of February. And as London is to the virtuous island of Britain, so is New York to the infamous land of the free.

The English are a moral race. They honestly believe their morals are purer than any upon the wide earth. That is why the Pictures are not only educational, but popular. They exhibit Cousin Yank in the buff. And even if the sight embarrasses the pious cheek of Euston Road, N. W., it is pleasant sometimes to spare a blush for one's rich relations.

In the dour eye that regarded Mame was sorrow. The girl looked harmless even if her speech was odd. But appearances are not things to bank on · at least in Mrs. Toogood's experience.

"Any old box'll do for me, so long as it's clean and ain't beyond my wad."

"I have a small room on the top floor." The landlady was guarded. It was next the servants and very

difficult to let; the p.g.'s of Fotheringay House were persons of clearly defined social status.

Mame welcomed with enthusiasm the prospect of a small room on the top floor. The landlady repeated the once-over without enthusiasm. Should she? Or should she not? An outlandish girl, American to the bone, but this attic would be none the worse for a tenant, provided, of course, that she was really a paying one.

Elmer P. Dobree had told Mame more than once that "she was cute as a bag of monkeys." The zoölogical resources of five continents could not have exceeded the flair with which Miss Durrance opened her vanity bag and produced an impressive roll of Bradburys.

"I'll be happy to pay a fortnight in advance." It was Mame's best Broadway manner. "Here is the money. I am a very respectable girl."

Reassured by the sight of the Bradburys rather than by the Broadway manner, which to the insular taste had a decidedly cosmopolitan flavour, the landlady went so far as to ask for a name and references.

"I'm a special European correspondent." Mame gave a slow and careful value to each word.

A faint beam pierced the landlady's gloom. She had feared "an actress"; although to be just to the girl she didn't look that sort.

"Here is my card," Broadway cold drawn and pure, with a dash of Elmer P. talking over the phone.

The châtelaine of Fotheringay House adjusted a pair of gold-rimmed eyeglasses and read:

Miss Amethyst Du Rance

New York City, U. S. A.

European Correspondent

Cowbarn *Independent*

The card was returned to its owner with polite thanks. A subtle gesture indicated that a sudden rise had occurred in the stock of Miss Amethyst Du Rance.

"I'm not quite sure, Miss Du Rance, but I may be able to find you a bedroom on the second floor."

Victory! The roll had begun the good work, but the card had consummated it. One up for the Cowbarn *Independent.*

Iowa's shrewd daughter had realized already that it would not do to make a poor mouth in Europe. All the same Aunt Lou's legacy was melting like snow. Money must appear to be no object as far as Miss Amethyst Du Rance was concerned; yet she must watch out or a whole dollar would not pull more than fifty cents.

"Top floor'll fix me." Mame it was who spoke, yet with the lofty voice of Miss Amethyst Du Rance. "Tariff'll be less, I reckon, but"—haughtily detaching a second Bradbury from the wad—"I'll be most happy to pay spot cash in advance for a fortnight's board and residence."

Money is quite as eloquent in London, England, as it is in New York or Seattle or Milpitas, Cal. Mame's air of affluence combined with a solid backing of notes did the trick, although the well-bred fashion in which a dyed-in-the-wool British landlady glossed over the fact seemed to render it non-existent.

"You have luggage, I presume?"

There was a trunk outside on the taxi.

"The porter will take it up to your room. I will ring for him now."

Mrs. Toogood suited the word to the action, the action to the word. She was crisp and decisive, final and definite. Mame felt this lady was wasted in private life. She ought to have been in Congress.

IV

FIVE minutes later Miss Amethyst Du Rance and all her worldly goods were assembled in a small musty bedroom at the top of Fotheringay House. It smelt of damp. There was no grate or stove or any means of heating. The floor was shod with a very cold-looking brand of lino. Only a thin layer of cement divided the ceiling from the tiles of the roof—so thin, indeed, that the all-pervading yellow fog could almost be seen in the act of percolating through them.

Mrs. Toogood, who had personally conducted her new guest up three pairs of stairs, lit the gas and drew the curtains across the narrow window. She then informed Miss Du Rance that dinner was at half-past seven, but there would be afternoon tea in the drawing room on the first floor in about half an hour.

Mame took off her coat and hat, removed the stains of travel from a frank and good-humoured countenance, re-did her hair and applied a dab of powder to a nose which had a tendency to freckle; and then she went downstairs. Stirred by a feeling of adventure she forgot how cold she was; also she forgot the chill that had gathered about her heart. London, England, was a long, long way from home. Its climate was thoroughly depressing and the same could be said of

its landladies. Whether the climate produced the landladies or the landladies produced the climate she had not been long enough in the island to say.

The light in the drawing room was dim. It half concealed a glory of aspidistra, lace curtains, antimacassars and wax fruits. There was a solemnity about it which by some means had been communicated to a unique collection of old women who upon sofas and chairs were collected in a semi-circle round an apology for a fire. Mame could not repress a shiver as one sibyl after another looked up from her woolwork or her book and gave the firm-footed and rather impulsive intruder the benefit of a frozen stare from a glacial eye.

By the time Mame had subsided on the only unoccupied seat within the fire's orbit, she felt that a jury of her sex having duly marked and digested her had come to the unanimous conclusion that she was guilty of presumption in being upon the earth at all. The detachment of this bunch of sibyls gave density and weight to the feeling. Their silence was uncanny. It was only disturbed by the click click of knitting pins and the occasional creak of the fire.

Mame had been five minutes in a situation which every second made more irksome, since for the first time in her life she was at a total loss for speech, when, as Mrs. Toogood had predicted, tea appeared. That lady, in a *démodé* black silk dress, which looked like an heirloom, preceded a metal urn, a jug of hot water, an array of cracked saucers and cups, some doubtful-

looking bread and butter, and still more doubtful-looking cake. All these things were borne upon a tray by the prim maid who had first admitted Mame to Fotheringay House.

The sight of "the eats" cheered Mame up a bit. And in conjunction with Mrs. Toogood's arrival, they certainly went some way towards unsealing the frozen atmosphere of the witches' parlour. A place was found for the hostess near the fire; the small maid set up a tea-table; the cups and saucers began to circulate.

Mame was served last. By then the brew, not strong to begin with, had grown very thin. "Rather weak, Miss Du Rance, I fear," loftily said its dispenser. "I hope you don't mind."

Mame, for whom that peculiarly British function which the French speak of as "le five-o'clock" was a new experience, promptly said she didn't mind at all. Her voice was so loud that it fairly shattered the hush; it was almost as if a bomb had fallen into a prayer-meeting. Every ear was startled by the power of those broad nasal tones.

"This is Miss Du Rance of America." The hostess spoke for the benefit of the company. It was not so much an introduction as an explanation; a defence and a plea rather than an attempt at mixing.

Some of the sibyls glared at Mame, some of them scowled. No other attention was paid her. Yet they were able to make clear that her invasion of the ancient peace of Fotheringay House was resented.

Little cared the visitor. Set of old tabbies. Bunch

of fossilised mossbacks. She was as good as they. And better. In drawing comparisons, Miss Du Rance was not in the habit of underrating herself or of overrating others. And she was a born fighter.

Was it not sheer love of a fight that had brought her to Europe? She already saw that London was going to be New York over again: a city of four-flushers, with all sorts of dud refinements and false delicacies, unknown to Cowbarn, Iowa. Of course she was a little hick. But cosmopolitan experience was going to improve her. And cuteness being her long suit, these dames had no need to rub her rusticity into her quite so good and hearty.

As Mame toyed with a cup of tea that was mere coloured water and took a chance with the last surviving piece of "spotted dog," which had just one raisin beneath a meagre scrape of butter, her quick mind brought her right up against the facts of the case. Somehow she wasn't in the picture. She must study how to fit herself into her surroundings. That was what she was there for; to see the world and to put herself right with it.

When in Rome you must do like the Romans, or you'll bite granite. Paula Wyse Ling had sprung that. And Paula knew, for she had travelled. What she really meant was that Mame Durrance must unlearn most of what she had learned at Cowbarn, Iowa, if she was going to fire the East.

Cowbarn was the home of the roughneck. But in New York City and London, England, highbrows

swarmed like bees. These places were the native haunts of that Culture in which Mame had omitted to take a course.

She was soon convinced this was the dullest party she had ever been at. But it didn't prevent her mind from working. Never in her life had she been more cast down. These people made her feel like thirty cents. They spoke in hushed and solemn voices. If this was Europe it would have been wiser to stay on her native continent.

Presently the small maid bore away the teapot and the crockery. With massive dignity the mistress followed her out. The landlady's withdrawal seemed, if it were possible, to add new chills to the gloom, and Mame having reached the point where she could stand it no longer, had just decided to make a diversion by going up to her bedroom and unpacking her trunk when a new interest was lent to the scene. A man entered the room. Mame's first thought was that he must have a big streak of natural folly to venture alone and unprotected into this nest of sleeping cats.

Strange to say, the temerarious male was made welcome. The density of the atmosphere lessened as soon as he came in. One old tabby after another began to sit up and take notice; and Mame, while busily engaged in watching the newcomer, had a feeling of gratitude towards him for having cast by his mere presence a ray of light upon that inspissated gloom.

Certainly he was no common man. As well as Mame could tell he was as old as the tabbies to whom he made

himself so agreeable. Yet he was old with a difference. His abundant hair, which was snow white, was brushed in a dandified way, and the note of gallantry was repeated in every detail of his personality. His clothes, though not strikingly smart, were worn with an air. There was style in the set of his necktie, and if his trousers might bag a little at the knees they somehow retained the cut of a good tailor. Also he wore a monocle in a way that seemed to add grace and charm to his manner and to cancel his curious pallor and his look of eld.

Mame was at once deeply interested in this new arrival. No doubt he was one of the blood-peers, of whom she had read. Down on his luck perhaps, and for all his pleasant touch of swank, he somehow suggested it. Besides it stood to reason that a real blood-peer, used to the best that was going, as this old beau plainly was, would not be spending his time in a dead-alive hole playing purry-purry puss-puss if he were not up against it.

All the same there was absolutely nothing in his manner to suggest a shortage of dough. It was so grand that it seemed to banish any vulgar question of ways and means. To judge by the way he dandled his eyeglass while he entertained the tabbies with his measured yet copious and genial talk, he might have been the King of England with his beard off.

When the clock on the chimneypiece struck seven the ladies rose in a body and withdrew to prepare for the evening meal. Their example was followed by Mame.

She would have liked to stay and get into conversation with the intriguing stranger, but dinner was in half an hour and it would take some little time to unpack her trunk in which was a new one-piece dress she was going to wear. Besides there would be a chance later in the evening, no doubt, of making his acquaintance.

As it happened this pleasure had to be postponed. To Mame's disappointment the old boy did not appear at dinner. But she did not blame him. The food was meagre and those who ate it were quite the dullest set she had ever seen. Some of the guests were accommodated with small separate tables. One of these had been provided for Miss Du Rance. It was in a draughty corner, exposed to a strong current of air between two open doors which led to a large and antiquated lift whereby the meal ascended from the basement.

Mame felt small-town, but she had come to Europe to learn. Even if the seclusion of a private table had its conveniences she would have much preferred to mingle with her fellow p.g.'s. She was social by nature. Besides, she was determined to be a mixer. All these folks had it in their power to teach her something, duds though they were. Britain must give up all its secrets to Miss Amethyst Du Rance. Judging by the deadbeats who swarmed in this fog-bound isle they might amount to nothing; at the same time one cannot know too much of one's subject. For some little time to come the subject for Miss Du Rance was going to be London, England.

V

THE next morning the fog had lifted and Mame set out for Fleet Street. By Mrs. Toogood's advice she boarded Bus 26 which passed the end of Montacute Square; and having made a friend of the conductor, a kindly and cheerful young man, he promised to let her know when they came to Tun Court.

He was as good as his word. In about ten minutes he pulled the cord and popped his head into the bus. "Y'are, miss. Tun Court's just opper-site." And then as a concession to Mame's accent, which was a long way from home: "Watch out, missy, when you cross the street."

Mame with her recent experience of Broadway and Fifth Avenue felt she could have crossed this street on her head. It was so narrow. And although there was no lack of traffic it was moving slow with a remarkable sense of order and alignment. But Mame liked the young conductor for his briskness and his courtesy; and as she stepped off the knife-board and with the fleetness of a slender-ankled nymph she dodged between the delivery vans of the Westminster *Gazette* and the *Morning Post* she winged him a bright smile.

London, so far, was a city of disappointments. Tun Court added to their number. It was mean, insignifi-

cant, tumble-down, grimy. But Mame had read that Doctor Johnson or some other famous guy had either lived or died in it. The latter probably. No man would have chosen Tun Court to live in, unless he had gone off the handle, as the famous, she had also read, were more apt to do than ordinary folks.

The salient fact about Tun Court, however, had nothing to do with Doctor Johnson. It was the home of the well-known Society journal *High Life*. Mame would not have looked to find a paper of repute housed in this nest of frowsty, mildewed offices in which there was not space to swing a cat. But she did look and with such poor success that she had to open her bag and produce the address which Paula Ling had given her in order to verify it. Yes, it was O.K.: Number Nine, Tun Court, Fleet Street. Yonder, through that decaying arch, which by some means had evaded the great fire of B.C. 1666—or it may have been A.D.?—was the footpath the ancient Romans had laid along the Fleet Ditch; and the cobblestones upon which Mame stood, which no doubt had been laid by the Romans also, indubitably rejoiced in the name Tun Court, since straight before her eyes a sign was up to say so.

The puzzle was to find Number Nine. Tun Court dealt in names, not numbers. Among the names *High Life* was not to be found. There was the registered London office of the *Quick Thinkers' Chronicle;* also of the *Broadcasters' Review;* also of the official organ of the Amalgamated Society of Pew Openers. These were the portents which leaped to Mame's eye, but the

one she sought did not seem to be there. At the far end of the alley, however, where the light was so bad that it was difficult to see anything, she was just able to decipher the legend, *High Life.* Top Floor. It was painted on a wall, inside a doorway.

Mame boldly attacked some dark stairs, very hollow sounding and decrepit and full of sharp turns, passing *en route* the outer portals of the Eatanswill *Gazette* and other influential journals. The higher rose the stairs the darker they grew. But at last patience was rewarded. *High Life*—Inquiries, met the pilgrim's gaze at the top of the second pair of stairs; yet had that gaze not been young and keen a match would have been needed to read the inscription on the wall.

She knocked on the door and went in. A pig-tailed flapper lifted her eyes slowly from Volume 224 of the Duchess Library.

In her best Broadway manner Mame asked if the editor was in. Miss Pigtail did not appear to be impressed by the Broadway manner. She made a bluff at concealing an out-size in yawns, laid aside her novelette with an air of condescension for which Mame longed to smack her face, and said, "I'll take in your name."

Mame felt discouraged, but she was determined not to let the minx know it. With an air she took a card from her bag; and Miss Pigtail after one supercilious glance at it went forth to an inner room whose door was marked Private.

In about thirty seconds Miss Pigtail reappeared.

"This way, please," she said haughtily. Mame still had a desire to put one over on the young madam; but evidently she was coming to business all right.

Seated before a roll-top desk, in a stuffy room twelve feet by twelve, whose only other furniture were an almanac and a vacant chair, was the editor of *High Life*. At least Mame surmised that the gentleman who received her occupied that proud position, even if he did not quite fulfil her idea of the part. It was difficult to say just where he fell short, but somehow he did fall short. He was one of those large flabby men who are only seen without a pipe in their mouths when they are putting liquids into it. His eyes were tired, his front teeth didn't seem to fit, and he had that air of having been born three highballs below par which some men inherit and others acquire.

The editor of *High Life* was not a prepossessing man, although the most striking thing about him, his large moustache, was so wonderfully pointed and waxed, that Mame felt quite hypnotised by it. However, she took a pull on herself, made her best bow and elegantly presented Paula Wyse Ling's introduction letter.

The visitor was invited to a chair. Then after brief examination of the envelope the editor made clear that he was not the person to whom it was addressed. "My name is Judson," he said, "Digby Judson. I took over from Walter Waterson about nine months ago."

"So long as you're the main guy," Mame assured

him, "it'll be all right. I want to connect up with this paper."

With a slight frown of perplexity Mr. Digby Judson opened Miss Paula Ling's letter. "It says nothing about experience," he remarked mildly. "And to be quite candid I don't know Paul M. Wing from Adam."

"It's a her," said Mame matter-of-factly. "Paula Ling's the name."

"I beg *her* pardon, but I don't know her from Eve."

Mame had a feeling that she had struck a concealed rock. "Old Man Waterson would have, anyway," she said; and with a royal gesture she indicated her own card, now lying on the editorial blotting pad.

Digby Judson took up the card and laughed. Mame was determined not to be sensitive, she simply could not afford to be, but that laugh somehow jarred her nerves. "Cowbarn *Independent.*" He gave her a comic look from the extreme corner of a bleared eye. "Holy Jones!"

Mame's heart sank. It was New York over again. This guy was not quite so brusque, but he had the same sneer in his manner. A sick feeling came upon her that she was up against it.

"Cowbarn *Independent!* I don't think you'll be able to get away with that."

It was almost like casting an aspersion upon Mame's parents. Natural pugnacity leaped to her eyes. In fact it was as much as she could do to prevent it from jumping off the end of her tongue. "A lot you know about it," she yearned to say, but prudently didn't.

The editor of *High Life* toyed with the card and drew a mock serious sigh for which Mame could have slain him. "When did you arrive in this country, Miss Du Rance?"

"I landed Liverpool yesterday morning."

"And may I ask what you propose to do now you've landed?"

For all the grim depth of her conviction that she could not afford to be thin-skinned, she resented the subtle impertinence of this catechism. Yes, it was New York over again. New York had advised her to cut out the Cowbarn and already she rather wished she had. But she had figured it out that London being a foreign city would not guess the sort of burg her home town was.

All the same her faith in herself was not shaken. It was weak to have these qualms. Mame Durrance was Mame Durrance if she hailed from Cowbarn, Iowa, and Abe Lincoln was Abe Lincoln even if he was raised in the wilds of Kentucky.

She crimsoned with mortification, but took herself vigorously in hand. "What'll I do now I've landed? What do you suppose I'll do?"

"Knock us endways, I expect."

"That'd be too easy, I guess—with some of you."

Mr. Digby Judson was by way of being a human washout but he liked this power of repartee. Few were the things he admired, but foremost among them was what he called "vim." This amusing spitfire certainly had her share of that.

"You think I'm a little hick." It is difficult to be wise when your temper breaks a string. "But I ain't. Leastways I ain't goin' to be always. With European experience I'll improve some."

"Ye-es, I daresay."

The dry composure of the editor's voice caused Mame to see red. "I'm over here to pull the big stuff. An' don't forget it."

Mr. Digby Judson found it hard to conceal his amusement. He gave his moustache a twirl and said patronisingly: "Well, Miss Du Rance, what can we do for you in the meantime?"

"Help me to a few dollars."

Mr. Judson threw up his hands with an air of weary scorn. "My good girl, to seek dollars in Fleet Street is like looking for a flea in a five-acre plot. Never have they been so scarce or so many people after 'em. And pretty spry too, you know. They've studied the newspaper public and can give it just what it wants."

Mame was undaunted. "A chance to see what I can do—that's all I ask."

"What can you do?"

"Suppose I write a bunch of articles on British social life as it strikes an on-time American."

"Let us suppose it." The editor had no enthusiasm.

"Will you print the guff and pay for it?"

This was in the nature of a leading question. Time was needed for Mr. Judson's reply. "Rather depends, you know, on the sort of thing it is." Out of deference for the feelings of his visitor he did his best to

hide the laugh in his eyes. "You see what we chiefly go for is first-hand information about the aristocracy."

Miss Du Rance was aware of that.

"Are you in a position to supply it?"

"I expect I'll be able to supply it as well as most if I get the chance."

"Well," said Digby Judson, fixing Mame with a fishlike eye, "when you find yourself included in a party at a smart country house you can send along an account of the sayings and doings of your fellow guests, a description of their clothes, where they are going to spend the summer, who is in love with who and all that kind of bilge, and I'll be very glad to consider it."

Mame thanked Mr. Judson for his sporting offer. "I'm sure you'll fall for my junk when you see it. There'll be pep in it. But of course I'll want intros to start in."

"You have introductions, I presume?" The editor still hid his smile.

Unfortunately Miss Du Rance was rather short of introductions. But she hoped *High Life* would be able to make good the deficiency.

High Life, it seemed, was not in a position to do so. But it had a suggestion to offer. Mr. Digby Judson looked through a litter of papers on his desk. Detaching one from the pile he refreshed his memory by a careful perusal. Then he said: "There is a vacancy for a housemaid, I believe, at Clanborough House, Mayfair."

The news left Mame cold.

"We have influence with the housekeeper at Clanborough House. She is not exactly a member of our staff, but she receives a fee to keep our interests at heart. Clanborough House is still a power in the political and social world. The position of housemaid offers considerable scope for a person of intelligence such as you appear to be, Miss Du Rance."

"I? Housemaid! Me?" The voice of Miss Du Rance went up a whole octave.

"Of course," said the editor, "to be quite candid, you would have rather to put a crimp in your style. These great houses are decidedly conservative. But you would find opportunities, large opportunities, believe me, in such a position for obtaining the information we require."

Mame was staggered. The rôle of hired girl, even in a mansion, had not entered her calculations. "What do you take me for?" She rebuttoned her gloves, snorting blood and fire. "Don't you see I'm a lady?"

Mr. Digby Judson gazed fixedly at Mame, stroking his exotic moustache in the process. "There are ladies *and* ladies. Frankly, Miss Du Rance, I can't promise much success over that course. You see, in this country at the present time we are overstocked, even with the genuine article. We are as prolific of ladies in England as they are of rabbits in Australia. But what we want here is pep and that's where you Americans have got the pull. It's pep, Miss Du Rance, we are out for, and that, I take it, you are able to supply."

Mame looked death at the editor. But she said nothing.

"If you're wise you'll give ladyism the go by. Better let me see if I can wangle this billet for you at Clanborough House. A rare chance, believe me, for a girl like yourself, to study our upper class from the inside. You'll be lucky if you get another such opportunity. If you really give your mind to the job I feel sure you'll do well."

"No hired girling for me, I thank you," Mame spoke in a level voice.

Mr. Digby Judson looked a trifle disappointed. "Well, think it over. But I am fully convinced of one thing."

A down-and-out feeling upon her, Mame asked dully what the thing was.

"It's the only terms on which you are ever likely to find yourself at Clanborough House or any other place of equal standing."

Mame bit her lip to conceal her fury. The insult went deeper than any she had received in New York. As she bowed stiffly and turned to go she had a sudden thirst for Mr. Digby Judson's blood.

She had reached the door, its clumsy knob was in her hand when she turned again, and said with a slow smile over-spreading a crimson face, "You'll excuse me asking, won't you, but do you mind telling me if it's *very* difficult to train canaries to roost on your moustache?"

VI

BITTERLY disappointed, Mame promptly found her way back into Fleet Street. The beginning was bad and there was no disguising it. Her New York experience had prepared her for difficulties further east; but she had not reckoned to bite granite so soon or quite so hard. If she put a crimp in her style she might take a situation as a housemaid!

Moving towards the Strand she had now a feeling of hostility towards the people around her. These mossbacks who crowded the sidewalks had some conceit of themselves. But who were they? Mame asked herself that. Who were they, anyway?

Luncheon at a cheap restaurant hardly improved Mame's temper. The "eats" seemed queer. But at any rate they appeared to stimulate the mind. In the course of the meal, with the help of a newspaper propped against the cruet, she did a lot of thinking.

To begin with, she must not look for too much success in London. As these Cockneys had it, Mame Durrance was not going to set the Thames on fire. The same applied with equal force to Miss Amethyst Du Rance. She must watch her step. Aunt Lou's legacy had now dwindled to something under five hun-

dred dollars. That plain fact was the writing on the wall.

Mame foresaw that her trip to Europe was not likely to prove a long one, unless by some happy chance she struck oil. But of this there was no sign. Since coming east she had met nothing but bad luck. And her reception in Tun Court that morning told her to expect no immediate change. Such being the case, she must put by half the money she still had, for a passage home across the Atlantic.

By counting every dime she might carry on in London six weeks. Within that time she hoped, of course, to find a means of adding to her slender store. But at the moment she could not say that things looked rosy. The folks here did not cotton to her, still less did she cotton to them.

After a slice of ham and a cup of coffee she ordered a piece of pumpkin pie. It was as if she had ordered the moon. The waitress had not even heard of the national delicacy.

Mame sighed. "Not heard of pumpkin pie!" This was a backward land. There was a lot of spadework to be done in it. A suspicion was growing that she would have done better to stay in New York. She had to be content with custard and stewed figs, upon which poor substitute she walked slowly along the Strand to Trafalgar Square. Here she turned into the National Gallery. As she ascended the many steps of the building she tried to raise a feeling of awe. Even if she was a little hick she knew that a true American

citizeness mentally takes off her shoes when she enters a dome of Culture.

The feeling of awe was not very powerful. But she was a sane and cool observer of things and people; and if she was too honest to pretend to emotions she didn't possess there was no reason why those walls should not be a mental stimulus.

She took a seat on a comfortable divan, before a large and lurid Turner, all raging sea and angry sky. This picture impressed Mame Durrance considerably less than it had impressed Ruskin. But a hush of culture all around enabled her to sit two good hours putting her ideas in order. A plan of some sort was necessary if she was going to make good. When she set out from Cowbarn, six months back, she felt that her natural abilities would carry her through anything. Now, she was not so sure. Things were no longer rose colour. There was a terrible lot of leeway to make up. She just had not guessed that she was so far behind the game. Perhaps it had been wiser to stay at home and put herself through college.

Chastened by the buffets of the day she returned to Montacute Square about five. When she entered the gloomy drawing room the tabbies received her icily. Not a sign of success on the horizon so far. The tea drinking was as depressing as ever. Nobody took any notice of her.

The aloofness of these frumps was as hard to bear as the insolence of the editor of *High Life*. Mame's resentment grew. Presently she rose and went up to

her cold bedroom. She got out her writing case. Perched with knees crossed, on the end of her bed, she spent a prosperous hour jotting down her first day's impressions of London, England.

Vigorous mental exercise seemed to take a load off her spirit. What she had written ought to raise a smile in Elmer P. To-morrow she would go at it again; then it should be typed and mailed. If the boob fell for it, and born optimist that Mame Durrance was, she felt he sure would, where that stuff came from there was good and plenty more to pull.

VII

WHEN Mame returned to the drawing room she was dressed for the evening meal. It was only seven o'clock and she counted on having the place to herself, since at that hour the tabbies would be occupied with their own preparations. But as it happened the room was not quite empty. There was just one person in it.

The old elegant, who had already excited Mame's curiosity, stood before the meagre fire warming his thin hands. As soon as she came in he turned towards her with a little bow of rare politeness.

"I am told," he said in the deepest, most measured tone Mame had ever heard, "you are an American."

Mame owned to that in the half-humorous manner she had already adopted for the benefit of these islanders. Some folks might have been abashed by this obvious grandee. Not so Miss Amethyst Du Rance. She was as good as the best and she was in business to prove it. These bums were not to be taken at their own valuation. Back of everything her faith in her own shrewd wits was unshakable.

"I have a very warm corner in my heart for all Americans."

"Have you so?" said Mame.

There was not a hint of patronage in the old buck's manner, yet in spite of his air of simple kindness, Mame somehow felt the King-of-England-with-his-beard-off feeling creeping upon her. He was the goods all right, this old john, but she was determined to take him in her stride as she would have taken President Harding or any other regular fellow.

"Won't you tell me your name?"

Mame opened the small bag which she never parted with, even at meal times, and took out her card. The old man fixed his eyeglass and scanned it with prodigious solemnity. "Cowbarn." A bland pause. "Now tell me, what state is that in? It's very ignorant not to know," he apologetically added.

"No, it ain't." Mame was captivated by the air of humility, although not sure that it was real. "Cowbarn's in the state of Iowa. On'y a one-horse burg."

"Ah, yes, to be sure, Iowa." The grandee made play with his eyeglass. "I remember touring the Middle West with Henry Irving in '89."

So long was '89 before Mame was born that she was a trifle vague upon the subject of Henry Irving. But she knew all about Lloyd George, Arthur, Earl of Balfour, and even Old Man Gladstone of an earlier day. She surmised that Henry was one of these.

"A senator, I guess?"

"My dear young lady, no." The tone of surprise was comically tragic. "Henry Irving was the greatest ac-torr Eng-laand ever produced."

"You don't say!" The awe in Mame's voice was an

automatic concession to the awe in the voice of the speaker.

"Yes, Eng-laand's greatest ac-torr." There was a note of religious exaltation in the old grandee. "I toured the United States three times with Henry Irving."

"Did you visit Cowbarn?" Mame asked for politeness' sake. To the best of her information, Cowbarn, like herself, had not been invented in '89.

"I seem to remember playing the Duke there to Henry Irving's Shylock at a one-night stand," said the grandee also for politeness' sake. He had never heard of Cowbarn, he had never been to Iowa, and in '89 Henry the August had given up the practice of playing one-night stands. But the higher amenities of the drawing room are not always served by a conservative handling of raw fact.

Mame, with that sharp instinct of hers, knew the old chap was lying. But it didn't lessen her respect. He had an overwhelming manner and when he gave the miserable fire a simple poke he used the large gesture of one who feels that the eyes of the universe are upon him. Still, with every deduction made, and a homely daughter of a republic felt bound to make many, he was the most human thing she had met so far in her travels.

His name was Falkland Vavasour. And in confiding to Mame this bright jewel of the English theatre, which his pronunciation of it led her to think it must be, he yet modestly said that its lustre was nought compared with the blinding effulgence of the divine Henry.

"Some ac-torr, old man Henry Irv," Mame was careful to pronounce the sacred word "actor" in the manner of this old-timer.

"My de-ah young lady, Henry Irving was a swell. Never again shall we look upon his like."

"I'll say not." And then with an instinct to hold the conversation at the level to which it had now risen Mame opened the door of fancy. "Come to think of it, I've heard my great-uncle Nel speak of Henry Irving. You've heard, I guess, of Nelson E. Grice, the Federal general, one of the signatures to the peace of Appomattox. He was the brother of my mother's mother. Many's the time I've set on Great-uncle's knee and played with the gold watch and chain that his old friend General Sherman give him the day after the battle of Gettysburg."

Great-uncle Nel had really nothing to do with the case, but Mame felt he was a sure card to play in this high-class conversation. The old Horse had not been a general, he had not signed the peace of Appomattox, and there was a doubt whether General Sherman, whose friend he certainly was, had ever given him a gold watch and chain; but he was a real asset in the Durrance family. Apart from this hero there was nothing to lift it out of the rut of mediocrity. Quite early in life Mame had realized the worth of great-uncle Nel.

Mr. Falkland Vavasour had the historical sense. He rose to General Nelson E. Grice like a trout to a may fly. The old buck refixed his eyeglass and recalled the Sixties. He was playing junior lead at the Liver-

pool Rotunda when the news came of President Lincoln's assassination. He remembered— But what did he not remember? Yes, great-uncle Nel was going to be a sure card in London, England.

Mame was getting on with the old beau like a house on fire when the clock on the chimneypiece struck half-past seven. Mr. Falkland Vavasour gave a little sigh and said he must go. Mame, quickened already by a regard for this charming old man, who lit the gloom of Fotheringay House, expressed sorrow that he was not dining in.

But it seemed that Mr. Falkland Vavasour never did dine in. This applied, in fact, to all his meals. All his meals were taken out.

"But why?" asked Mame disappointedly.

"My dear young lady"—the old-timer's shrug was so whimsical yet so elegant it sure would have made Henry Irving jealous—"one has nothing against the cook of our hostess— But!"

Until that moment Mame had not realized what a world of meaning a simple word can hold.

She was keenly disappointed. As the first tabby invaded the drawing room Mr. Falkland Vavasour passed out. A glamour, a warmth, passed out with him. Everything grew different. It was a change from light to darkness; it was like a swift cloud across the sun.

VIII

THE days to follow wrought havoc with Aunt Lou's legacy. Mame's idea had been to support herself with her pen during her stay in England. She had a gift, or thought she had, for expressing herself on paper; she had a sharp eye for things, she had energy and she had ideas; yet soon was she to learn that as far as London went the market for casual writing was no better than New York.

Times there were when she began to regret her safe anchorage at Cowbarn. But she did not spend much time looking back. She was determined to be a go-getter. Briskly she went about the town, seeing and hearing and jotting down what she saw and heard. And every Friday morning she mailed a packet of her observations to the Cowbarn *Independent*.

Weeks went quickly by. No word came from the only friend she had in the small and tight world of editors. Even Elmer P. Dobree, on whom she had optimistically counted, had turned her down. And things were not going well with her. She had not been able to earn a dollar in Europe, yet daily the wad was growing less. The time was sure coming when she would have to go home with her money spent and only a few chunks of raw experience to show for it.

Perhaps she had tried to prise off a bit too much. Wiser, perhaps, to have stuck to her job. She had been a fairly efficient stenographer and typist. But her active mind was bored. Hovering around that hard stool in the *Independent* office it wanted all there was in the world. Yet first New York and now London, in their sharp reality, had taught her that the world was a bigger place than she had allowed for. And there were more folks in it. There were simply millions of Mame Durrances around: every sort of go-getter, all wanting the earth and with just her chance of connecting up. But if the worst came, so she had figured it out, and she failed to click in what these Britishers called "journalism," she would always be able to return to an office stool.

Now, however, she was not so sure. As far as London went, it had six million people and half of them seemed to be looking for jobs. Just to keep in touch she had applied for one or two vacancies advertised in the papers. She had no real wish to get them. It would have been an admission of defeat and it was early days for that. But it would be well, in case the time really came, to know how to come in out of the rain.

She had applied in person but results were not encouraging. Secretarial work was badly paid in London and the struggle for it terrible. There was nothing like enough to go round. Besides, when all was said, Miss Amethyst Du Rance had not come to England to adorn an office stool.

It was not yet time to say good-bye to ambition. She still firmly believed it was in her to make good as a newspaper girl. But it was not easy to conquer the East. Compared with most of these high-flyers and four-flushers she was up against, with their finesse and their culture and their slick talk, Mame Durrance was a little hick. No use disguising it; she was a little hick. "A sense of ignorance is the beginning of knowledge" was one of the mottoes for 1921 in the office calendar which had adorned the fly-walk at the back of her typewriter and which, with an eye to the future, she had committed to memory in her spare moments.

The beginning of knowledge for Mame Durrance meant covering up your tracks. She must see that none of her fellow go-getters put one over on her. But even that simple precaution was not easy. They smiled every time she opened her face, these college boobs. And being as sharp as a hawk she had soon decided that her first duty was to get rid of her accent.

To this end she went freely about, she dressed to the limit of her slim purse, she laid herself out to meet interesting folks. Her fellow p.g.'s of Fotheringay House could not be considered interesting. But there was one exception. Mr. Falkland Vavasour continued to show himself much her friend. And he was quite the most interesting creature she had met. He was, also, very useful. It was a joy to hear him speak what he called the King's English. She felt she could not do better than model herself on this living fount of euphony.

First she must cast out the nasal drawl that raised a smile wherever it was heard. Then she must mobilise the vowels and consonants of the mother tongue in the style which gave Mr. Falkland Vavasour an assured position in the drawing room of Fotheringay House. The tabbies, for the most part man-haters, simply hung on the words of Mr. Falkland Vavasour. This was mainly due, in Mame's opinion, to his faultless voice production; and she soon set to work to study it.

Paula Wyse Ling, the most accomplished go-getter of her acquaintance, had said it was worth any girl's while to visit London in order to acquire an English accent. Mame had doubted this. What was good enough for Cowbarn, Iowa, should have been good enough for the whole world. But the world, it seemed, was some place. She now began to see what Paula meant.

No sooner had Miss Amethyst Du Rance won the friendship of Mr. Falkland Vavasour than she decided that something must be done in the matter. She discreetly asked if he could tell her how to improve her voice. The old man tactfully said it didn't need improvement. In his opinion it was a fine and powerful organ. Mame felt this was politeness. Her voice didn't lack force but force was the trouble. "It needs a soft pedal," said Mame. "Refinement, you know, and charm and all the frills of the West End theatres, restaurants and shops."

The old actor had a sense of humour and a kind

heart. He was amused by Mame, and he liked her. It would have been hard for an artist in life not to like such naïveté, such enthusiasm, such concentration, such fire. But this voice of hers was a problem. It had a natural punch that treated brick walls as if they were brown paper.

Toying with his monocle, in all things the perfect john, he drawled: "My de-ah young lady, if I may say so, your voice is mag-nif-i-cent, simply mag-nif-i-cent."

Mame's smile crumpled under the sheer action-pressure of her mind. "Some ways it ain't. Some ways it's wanting."

"A shade more of—er, distinction perhaps?"

"Distinction." Mame darted on the word like a bird on an insect. "You said it. Distinction's mine. And I'll get it, too—if it kills me."

"My de-ah young lady, perfectly simple for a girl of your talent."

"Honest? You think that?" The good grey eye glowed hopefully. "I wish I could say mag-nif-i-cent as poyfect as you can."

"You will, my de-ah young lady, believe me, you will."

"Well, I'll start to learn right now."

Mr. Falkland Vavasour smiled approval. He advised her to draw three deep breaths from the lower chest and to pronounce the word syllable by syllable.

Mame stood to her full height. She inflated. "Mag-nif-i-cent! Mag-nif-i-cent! Mag-nif-i-cent!"

"My de-ah young lady, what could be better?"

This was vastly encouraging. But it was only a beginning and her nature was to leave nothing to chance. A little later that day she acquired a second-hand copy of Bell's *Standard Elocutionist* from a bookshop in the Charing Cross Road. And then she arranged for Mr. Falkland Vavasour to hear her say a little piece every morning, when the drawing-room was empty.

IX

MAME'S friendship with "the mystery man" continued to grow. That was a name his fellow guests had given him. His comings and goings were indeed mysterious. Nobody knew where he took his meals. Nobody knew what his circumstances were. All the time he had been at Fotheringay House, which was quite a number of years, his name had never been seen in a playbill. But there was a legend that he had once had an engagement with Bancroft at the old Prince of Wales.

He was always dressed immaculately, he was the soul of courtesy, his talk was urbane, and to Mame at any rate, it seemed highly informed. But there was no concealing from her keen eyes that the old boy was thin as a rail. In fact she would hardly have been surprised if some bright morning a wind from the east had blown him away altogether. As for his clothes, in spite of the wonderful air with which he wore them, and good as they had been, they were almost threadbare and literally shone with age.

Mame gathered from one of the tabbies, who in the process of time began to thaw a little, that Mr. Falkland Vavasour was a distant connection of the landlady's. This fact was held to explain why he was

allowed to live at Fotheringay House while invariably taking his meals at his club. At least it was generally understood that it was at his club that he took his meals. But wherever he may have taken them, even if the food was more delicate than at Fotheringay House, it could hardly have been more abundant. Week by week the old man grew thinner and thinner. His step on the drawing-room carpet grew lighter and more feeble. Even his wonderful voice lost something of its timbre. Yet amid all these signs of decay, he retained that alert, sprightly man-of-the-worldliness which Mame found so curiously fascinating.

One morning, soon after breakfast, when she had been nearly five weeks at Fotheringay House, she sat in a corner of the dismal drawing room adding up her accounts and gloomily wondering whether the time had not come to look for "board and residence" that would cost less. Suddenly there came a rude shock. Mrs. Toogood entered in a state of agitation. Mr. Falkland Vavasour had just been found dead in his bed.

A doctor had already been sent for. But until he arrived the cause of Mr. Falkland Vavasour's death must remain, like the old man himself, a mystery. The landlady as well as her p.g's were quite at a loss to account for the tragic occurrence. Miss Glendower, the most conversational of the tabbies, opined that it must be sheer old age. Dear Mr. Falkland Vavasour must certainly be very old.

Miss Du Rance agreed that he must be. For was he not playing the junior lead at the Liverpool Rotunda when the news came of President Lincoln's assassination?

"What year was that?" asked Miss Glendower.

"'Sixty-five." Mame gave that outstanding date in history with pride and with promptitude. Before starting east she had fortified a memory naturally good by a correspondence course; therefore she could trust it.

Miss Glendower had no doubt at all that old age was the cause of death. But Mame was visited suddenly by a grim suspicion. It might be old age. Or it might not— Before giving an opinion she would await the doctor's verdict.

In a few minutes came the doctor. He was received by Mrs. Toogood, who led him slowly up two flights of stairs to the room of Mr. Falkland Vavasour. Overmastered by curiosity, and with an ever-deepening agitation fixing itself upon her—Mame had really liked this kindly and charming old man—she followed a small procession up the stairs.

She stood on the threshold of the room while the doctor bent over the bed. First he took one frail and shrunken hand and then he took the other.

"I've never heard him complain of any kind of illness," she heard the landlady say in a low voice. "He never gave one the slightest reason to suspect there was anything wrong."

"How long has he lived here?" the doctor asked.

"He has occupied this room for more than twenty years."

"An actor, I think you said?"

"Oh, yes. Mr. Falkland Vavasour, quite a celebrated actor."

"I don't seem to remember the name. No doubt he belongs to a bygone generation."

"He was a very distinguished man."

"Where did he get his meals?"

"His meals?" The voice of the landlady grew a little vague. "Of late years he always took his meals out."

"Can you tell me where?"

"At one of his smart clubs in the West End, I believe."

"Which one in particular did he frequent? Can you tell me?"

Mrs. Toogood, unfortunately, could not. But she understood that he had been a member of several.

"Do I understand you to say, ma'am," said the doctor, gently releasing the hand of the old man, "that Mr. Falkland Vavasour never took any food in this house?"

"When he came here first," said the landlady, "he was usually in to all his meals. Then he gave up having dinner in the evening because of his digestion. After that he took to having his luncheon out. And for the last year, for some reason or other—he was

always a bit faddy and peculiar in his ways—he used to go out for his breakfast. But as he had been here so long and he was a sort of connexion of my late husband's—I don't quite know what the relationship was but my husband was always proud of him—I allowed him to keep on his room."

"It was duly paid for, I presume?"

"Always, punctually, until about three weeks ago. When he got behind it seemed to trouble him a good deal, but I told him not to worry."

"Well, I am sorry to have to tell you that there will have to be a post mortem. Mr. Falkland Vavasour has all the appearance of having died of starvation."

Mame waited to hear no more. She was deeply grieved. And she was rather shocked. Yet she was not so shocked as she would have been had not her swift mind leaped forward to the doctor's verdict, even before the worthy man had arrived to give it. Yes, the grisly truth was plain for any who had eyes to see. Grand seigneur to the end, too proud to eat a crust he could not pay for, his only means of livelihood vanished long ago, he had passed out as he had lived, a prince among four-flushers.

Upstairs, in the privacy of her dismal room, Mame wept. Something had gone from Fotheringay House, something that could never return. Among all the millions of people seething around, this dear old man had been her only friend.

Shivering on the edge of her bed in that chill attic,

she felt horribly lonely now. Nostalgia came upon her, a longing for home. She did not understand these people. A powerful craving for the hearty, simple folks she knew and loved crept over her while she fought to control her tears.

X

SUCH havoc had been played in a short time with Mame's cash balance by the life of London, England, that already the margin of safety was nearly reached. By the end of that week—it was Tuesday now—she would be compelled to take a bus to Cockspur Street and see about a passage home.

The thought was not pleasant. A second failure, if hardly so painful as the one in New York, was even more dire. For by the time she looked again on the Statue of Liberty very nearly all the munitions of war would have vanished. And what would remain to show?

Mame needed all her grit to bear up. The tragic end of Mr. Falkland Vavasour was the writing on the wall. Did it not prove how fatally easy it was for people, even of a certain position, to fall out of the ranks?

The clouds were gathering. Since landing in England she had not earned a dime. She had called on many editors and found them inaccessible; she had mailed them her stuff; but there was nothing doing. Her style was not what they were used to; and this nation of snails prided itself on being conserva-

tive. But the worst blow of all was the silence of Elmer P. Dobree.

Swift time flowed on. But the much-looked-for envelope, bearing the magic postmark "Cowbarn, Iowa," did not come. Friday by Friday, with the super-optimism her high-spirited countrywomen have elevated to a religion, the dauntless Mame mailed two columns to the editor of the Cowbarn *Independent*. Each week as she registered the packet and slipped the chit into her handbag she was as sure that Elmer P. would fall as she was convinced she could turn off that sort of junk until the cows came home. The stuff was good. Even a simp with half an eye could see that. Not highbrow, but better; the newspapers wanted things homely and plain. And there was any amount of pep in it. Every word was hot from the mint of experience.

All the same the weeks went and not so much as a line of acknowledgment came from the man on whose friendship she had counted. This silence was mysterious and exasperating. However, she would not let herself be cast down. She went freely about this comic town of London. There was more to it than at first she had supposed. Her first impression had been of a slower New York; a New York with a certain amount of moss on it. But when she had spent a few weeks noting and recording the ways of this queer burg, she began to see that it had its own standards, its own way of doing things and that it would repay study.

She had really come to Europe to improve her knowledge of the world. Once properly grounded in what to Mame's mind was the first of all sciences, she would return to New York, that city of four-flushers which had mocked and derided her, with the ace of trumps concealed up a fashionable sleeve.

To this end she must get around; and, if she could, contrive to see the life of London from the inside. Among such self-contained and stand-off folks this was not easy. That was why she had stayed on at Fotheringay House. It was the best address she could afford. Nay, as things went with her, it was a better address than she could afford. But its portentous air of propriety was worth paying for. New York had taught her that propriety, an elusive soulless thing, was indispensable for a girl who had to play a lone hand.

She was living far beyond her means, but she managed to see just a little of smart restaurants at luncheon and at tea time. Picture galleries bored her, but she conscientiously did them. Culture was always worth while; another card to keep up your sleeve. At concerts and theatres she occupied a cheap seat; she saw all the sights of the town. And now, at a tragic moment, came the knowledge that she must pack up and go home.

Moving about the streets, she felt this day to be the worst she had yet known. Even the humiliation put on her by the New York police had not yielded a sensation of being so truly up against it. Not a chance did

there seem of making good. She would give herself till Saturday and then arrange to quit.

For the first time since her arrival in London she perceived a touch of spring in the air. Emboldened, she climbed on to the roof of Bus 56 and let it take her where it would. The line of route was along the Embankment, past the Houses of Parliament, across Westminster Bridge. Old Father Thames was lovely this morning, with a hint of blue sky furtively peeping through soft grey mist.

As Mame looked back and saw the line of great hotels towering up and dominating the river with their haughty façades, never to her had they appeared so aloof, so magnetic, so inaccessible. Her desire had been to storm those cosmopolitan portals, but moving now towards the humbler purlieus of the southeast, she could not help reflecting bitterly how ill-founded was that ambition.

Still she was a fighter. The trick was in her blood. And never had the sense of her inheritance been more insurgent than on the top of Bus 56 this rare March morning, when for Mame Durrance the bottom seemed out of things. She could not bear the thought of giving in. Memories of great-uncle Nel rose in her heart. She could remember that fine old warrior having said that when things looked blackest for the Union in the Civil War, his chief, the famous General Sherman, had declared, "If only we can stick it the clouds will lift."

These words, of late, had been much with her. Since she had started out to see the world and had

known what it was to lie worried, sleepless, heavy eyed, in an airless attic, she had often recalled just how great-uncle Nel turned a thin but strong cigar over in his teeth as he made his contribution to history.

Yes, all came back to the power of sticking it. As Bus 56 trundled on, Mame kept repeating to herself that memorable phrase. If only she could stick it! That odd faculty was the measure of her worth, as it had been that of folks whose shoes she was not fit to tie.

XI

AS luck would have it, Bus 56 came at last to a stop opposite a cinema in Camberwell Green. The posters outside were featuring the fratricidal conflict in which great-uncle Nel had borne a part. Indeed, there was a certain quaint old-timer who had a poster all to himself immediately under the booking office window who was General Sherman's colleague to the very life. At the sight of this warrior something thrilled in Mame. She was not superstitious and she always made a point of believing as little as possible of what one had no means of proving; but that picture went some way to convince her that at this moment the occult was putting one over on her.

Promptly she got off the bus and made for the booking office. But a notice under the window said it was not open until two o'clock and that the show did not begin until half an hour later. As yet it was barely one o'clock, so there was nothing for it but to kill the time.

Mame took a walk up Denmark Hill. It was not a very inspiring altitude. Nor did a glass of milk and a bath bun at a dairyman's near the tram terminus at East Dulwich station do much to raise her spirits.

Never had she felt so intensely that she was nearing a crisis.

Back again at Camberwell Green she entered the cinema just as the orchestra was tuning up. It was an orchestra of two, a fiddle and a piano, and it seemed to add to her depression. Out of deference to the film, which was entitled "Scenes from the Great Civil War," the fiddle and the piano discoursed those melodies with which Mame's childhood had been most familiar.

They began with "Suwanee River" and kindred themes of de ole plantation and went on to "John Brown's Body" and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Mame soon wished that she had stayed outside. With all respect to great-uncle Nel she was not in a mood to enjoy this *réchauffé* of her youth. For she could not forget that her youth had been hard and unhappy.

In the first place she had never known a mother's love. At her birth her father had been left a widower. But when Mame, an only child, was five years old, he married a hard-natured, unsympathetic woman. Good had come, indirectly, of the stepmother's rule. It had not made for joy; but those years had fanned a secret flame in Mame's ambitious heart. Resentment took the form of a passion for self-improvement. With the help of the village schoolmarm, kindly Miss Jenkins, she studied so hard in the hours when minds less nimble were asleep, that on her eighteenth birthday she was able to fill a vacant stool in the *Independent* office. And

on that red-letter day, life for Mame Durrance began.

The opening scenes of the film brought back the past vividly. A hundred details, half-forgotten, reminded her of the farm four miles from Cowbarn, where she had been brought up. She saw again, in the types thrown on the screen, the dour, lean, Middle Western farmer, her father. The sight of him was an intolerably painful memory. An embittered, unsuccessful man, who in his later days had often drunk more whiskey than was good for him, in Mame's recollection, he had never been happy in his work or in his home. He had been years in his grave, yet time, the healer, did not allow his daughter to feel affection for him. Still perhaps she had a little pity. He was one of life's miss-fires. Groping along from year to year in the old rut, without vision, without initiative, a weak man rather than a bad one, his sins mainly were the sins of omission. And the worst of them, in the eyes of his child who had paid for it, was that he had not been man enough to stand up to the selfish vixen he had taken for his second wife.

It was no use pretending that the film's poignant reminders of her childhood were pleasant. The discomfort, the toil, the loneliness, all came back to her. How had it been possible for a creature like herself, with only a half-educated village dame to help her, to get away from it all? That was the question now in her mind. And the emotion aroused by these familiar scenes had little enough to do with the heroic figure of her real mother's Uncle Nel, although the fine type

to which he belonged was also there. Uppermost in Mame were disgust and pity. But she had escaped. By some miracle she had escaped. And no matter what happened to her now, she knew that she could never go back to the drudgery and the boredom of the place whence she came.

Memories of the past grew too painful to bear. Mame did not wait for the battle pieces. Even great-uncle Nel's General Sherman, who had a picture all to himself, and the soldierly groups, in any one of whom might be the rare old man she remembered so clearly, had not the power to stay the panic rising in her heart. It was weak, this sense of tumult; it was foolish and worse than foolish, it was cowardly; but quite suddenly Mame cast all thought from her of great-uncle Nel. She got up and fled from the cinema.

Outside, amid the dismal waste of bricks and mortar, which ironically called itself Camberwell Green, a rather frosty March sun was waning. Mame stood a few moments under the awning of the cinema in a state of irresolution, not knowing what to do next. It was as if she had become hypnotised by a sense of life's vastness and complexity. The world was far beyond all calculation; yet now she felt just the meanest thing in it.

However, she caught sight of Bus 56, wheeling round to the opposite kerb. It was about to return to Charing Cross. Mame lost no time in climbing to a seat on the roof. Bus 56, at that moment, was the one thing in her life that held the core and semblance of

reality. All the rest was chaos and old night. But this prosaic vehicle meant something. Panic-stricken as Mame now was, it stood for will, volition, force.

Yes, she was panic-stricken. It was very absurd. In the most illogical and unexpected way, a subtle demon had sprung upon her for the second time. The first had been in that epic moment when she had driven in a cab to the police office in New York with the horrid Detective Addelsee sitting by her side. But on that occasion there had been some excuse for this feeling of dull and helpless terror. On the present occasion there was none.

The shrewd air of the bus top revived her a bit. Her fighting spirit began to rally. If once it deserted her she was done. Why this attack of cold feet? There was nothing to be afraid of. She still had money enough to get home. It would not be the Iowa farmhouse to which she knew now she could never return. Home, for her, must be one of the big and friendly cities of that republic of which she was proud to be a daughter.

Big indeed were those cities. But were they so very friendly? Mame had begun to ask herself that by the time Bus 56 had reached the Elephant and Castle. Frankly, in her experience of them, they were not. To a little hick, as raw as herself, New York, for example, had been quite the reverse. Apart from Aunt Lou's dollars, it had no use for her. It had swallowed nine hundred of those dollars and lodged

her in jail before you could say knife. No, friendly was not quite the word for New York.

Still, in this bleakly inhospitable island, which was gulping her dollars just as quickly, even if it had refrained from putting her in jail, it would not do to knock New York. It was where she belonged. America had treated her pretty rough but it was the land she loved and admired. She might hate her stepmother and deplore her father, yet after all it was the home of her mother's memory. No, in spite of failures and bad breaks, it would not do to knock little old New York.

This sentiment, which she knew to be no more logical than the others, was so vividly upon her by the time she left the bus at Charing Cross, that she crossed at once to the office of the shipping company in Cockspur Street. If a boat, by which she could afford to travel, was leaving at the end of the week, she would book a passage. Better say good-bye to London a week too soon, than stay a week too long and find yourself stranded.

When, however, she reached the offices of the shipping company she felt bound to pause before she went in. Was it wise to act so precipitately? Why surrender to wild impulses? It was a big decision to make on the spur of the moment. What she did now could not be undone later. She had figured on staying another week in London. Every day's experience was valuable. Any day she might hear from Elmer Dobree,

telling her that her stuff was O.K., asking for more, enforcing his demands with a cheque.

Unreasoningly as her cinema panic, an odd wave of optimism flowed over Mame as she stood gazing into the shipping company's window. She had always yielded to this recurring wave that seemed to spring from her higher nature. Had she not done so from the beginning she would still be eating out her heart on her father's farm. What could have seemed more hopeless than for Mame Durrance to thirst after Culture? Yet that craving, in the end, had taken her to the county town, to the office of the *Independent.* And this simple faith in the future had carried her to New York and finally three thousand miles across the Atlantic as far as Europe. Was this the hour to go back on the urge of nature?

"If only you can stick it, the clouds will lift." She didn't know where the voice came from, but those familiar words sounded clear as a bell. Yes, she must stick it. That was what life was for: to keep a stiff upper lip; to face your luck; to go down fighting.

While she stood gazing at a model of a Cunarder in the window of the shipping company, she was quickened by new power. Whence it came there was no means of knowing; but just behind her was Trafalgar Square, and the lions, and the mighty column a grateful nation had raised to the memory of a Nelson even more remarkable than the brother of her grandmother. Sure, it must have been from the top of that monument the thought wave had come.

She appeared to be borne on the wings of inspiration. The time was not yet to give in. She would stay another week. But an effort of the will was needed to leave that too-enticing window. She crossed the road as leisurely as the taxis and the buses would permit; yet brain and heart were in conflict as she entered Pall Mall.

Outside the Carlton she paused. A line of smart cars was disgorging brilliant occupants. Mame stood wistfully in the shadow of the portico, observing, as she had done so many times in the last seven months, the life of ease, luxury and wealth from the outside. She felt like a peri at the gates of Paradise. If once she could gain a footing within those charméd portals, the capacity was surely hers to enjoy their delights.

This evening her thoughts seemed to make her desperate. Never had the spirit of adventure burned so high. It was her duty to count every dime, but this day, take it altogether, was the worst she had met since landing in England. She was fed to the teeth with disappointment and the sense of just being out of things. There had been too much cold shoulder. But there was money still in her purse.

Before she realized what she was doing, she was mingling with the smart mob and passing through the revolving doors. As the delicate strains of an orchestra caught her ear, her little head went up and she began to move more freely. She considered herself to be very well dressed, if a little "tossed" from a series of rides on the roof of divers plebeian buses. Even

if she was down on her luck she was free, white and twenty-one. And she could pay her shot; therefore she had a right to show her nose among the plutes.

The large room, on whose threshold Mame found herself, without quite knowing how she got there, seemed to be full already. Very distinguished-looking females and equally distinguished-looking males were standing around, in twos and threes. They were scanning, as it were, the far horizon for vacant tables.

Vacant tables, however, there were none. It was the hour when the theatre matinées yield up their tea-thirsty patrons. Standing room only appeared to be the order of the moment. And truth to tell, Mame did not feel altogether displeased. If she found a seat at one of those seductive little tables, it would mean half a crown at the very least. And in the present state of Wall Street half a crown was money.

This was pusillanimity. She was out for adventure. And she really wanted tea. Something in the much-abused British climate seems to call for tea at five o'clock. Therefore Mame's slim little body began to insinuate itself nearer the cups and saucers and the elegant confectionery; whereas bodies less slim and not so little remained outside the sphere of their influence.

Gazing around on the crowded scene, Mame awoke to the fact that an extremely smart-looking girl, seated alone some two tables off, and smoking a cigarette in a long meerschaum holder, had fixed a demure eye upon her. Some little time it had been there, but Mame

did not know that. Every detail was taken in already by a glance candid yet wary. Clothes, hat, eyes, chin, the face of wistful emotion: Mame was a rare butterfly with quaint markings, a new specimen for the net of a collector. Suddenly the girl's eye caught Mame's. She coolly signalled with the meerschaum holder that there was room at her table.

As Mame moved towards it she was ready to believe, such was this smart girl's easy air, that she had been mistaken for one of her friends. Mame felt that she must bear a likeness to somebody else. But no, this was not the case. The girl at once began to treat her choice "find" with the off-hand courtesy which seemed to be her attitude towards the world at large.

She lifted a muff, a real sable affair, from a seat near by in order to free a chair. As Mame subsided into it with her politest thanks, the girl looked at her shrewdly and then said in a casual voice, "You want a waiter."

Before Mame could take steps to get a waiter, her new friend, who was full of cheery competence, had attracted one. Her manner of doing so was in no wise aggressive, yet it was quite successful. The last word in waiters, all smiles and all ears, soon materialised at Mame's elbows.

"I can recommend the crumpets. They're very good to-day." The girl followed her genial information with something in Italian or French to the waiter which Mame did not understand. It was probably Italian, for the waiter was an undoubted Wop. He crisply

brushed the tablecloth with his napkin, arranged cup and saucer, knife and plate upon it, and then went smilingly off to execute Mame's order.

"Some folks around," said Mame conversationally.

"A regular beehive." The girl had a slow, deep smile which at the sound of Mame's voice began to grow.

"All the old-timers, I'll say, from way back."

At that remark the girl laughed outright, but in a way that was friendly. Mame felt encouraged to let her tongue run.

"Say, listen, who is the dame with the auburn wig and the Roman nose?"

"Ah, you mean the old dreadnought." The meerschaum holder tactfully indicated the next table but one where the personage in question sat in state. "Eighty-five if an hour. Blind as a bat, deaf as a mole, but worth looking at, I always think."

Mame's laugh chimed with the girl's. The old dreadnought, in a Victorian bonnet and mantle, with a nose standing off from a craggy face like a handle from a door, was a type. Mame was so much interested that she repeated her question.

"Old Duchess Hattie," said the girl lightly. "Everybody in England knows her. Among other things she's my godmother."

"Oh!" said Mame. Warily and at once she withdrew her gaze from the ancient duchess to this new friend who claimed her for a godmother. Involuntarily her fingers clutched her vanity bag to make sure

it was still on her wrist. London as well as New York had its four-flushers. Mame looked at the girl opposite with a new curiosity.

Was she the real thing? Or was she merely putting one over on an obvious simp? Certainly she was smart. And if not exactly a looker, she had heaps of style. Besides she had these high-grade waiters feeding from the hand. The Wop had already interrupted these deep reflections with Bohea in a china pot and crumpets fairly sizzling in butter.

Followed more conversation in Italian. The girl then fitted an eyeglass, very neat and inconspicuous, into her right eye and glanced at the programme of music. "Don't you think we might have the Rosencavalier instead of this thing of Massenet's for number seven?" She looked at Mame. But Mame, out of her depth, merely looked at the waiter. "Yes, I think so." The girl provided the answer for herself. "Give my compliments to M'sieu." She turned quietly to the Wop as if she owned him and continued her speech in Italian.

Virgilio bowed gracefully and made his way up the room towards the band.

Mame, under cover of a bold attack on a crumpet, furtively watched her new friend. She was puzzled and fascinated by her. This bird was something new. Her clothes were of the best yet they were not startling. Even her eyeglass and her meerschaum cigarette holder, remarkable in any one else, did not seem out of the picture. Her talk was lively and clever; her atti-

tude towards that world which ordinary people only read about in the newspapers was one of an amused familiarity; yet her manners were neither boastful nor loud. If four-flusher she was, and Mame felt she must be, it was a more subtle breed than any which had crossed her path up to now.

For the pleasure of drawing the girl out and perhaps in the hope that she would give herself away in a handful large enough to set all doubts at rest, Mame tentatively said over the edge of a teacup, while marking the new acquaintance very closely indeed: "I s'pose you know all the folks."

"More or less."

Somehow it was not the answer Mame expected. A real four-flusher would have posed a bit in making it. She would have struck something of an attitude, and tried to look like an oil painting of a First Family. But this girl didn't. Paula Wyse Ling, who had spent two whole years studying European society and was now beginning to get her stuff into some of the best journals in America, would never have answered such a question in that casual style. Paula would have preened her feathers and with her voice right up would have looked down her long nose and said: "Oh, yes, I have had the privilege of meeting some quite good people."

Suddenly Mame's eye lit on one other appurtenance of this new friend which hitherto had escaped it. Peeping in the oddest way out of a fashionable sleeve was the tiniest imaginable Pekingese. The sight of the

quaint creature was so unexpected and its air of dignified aloofness so entirely charming that Mame could not repress her delight.

"Ain't he just cute!" She proceeded to offer sugar.

The small beast gazed haughtily at Mame. And then disdaining the sugar in a most aloof manner, retired at least six inches further into the sleeve of his mistress.

"Rather nice, isn't he? But always apt to be stiff and formal unless he feels he's been properly introduced. You see he's a Chinese emperor's sleeve-dog and his pedigree goes right back with a click to the First Ming Dynasty."

"What's his name?" asked Mame partly for the sake of conversation, partly to show that she was impressed.

"Fu Ching Wei. He was given me by the Emperor of Manchuria when I attended his coronation last year at Mukden."

In the opinion of Mame this was overdoing it. This girl was certainly trying to put one over on her. And Mame had already come to like her so much, although to be sure she had only known her five minutes, that she felt sorry. If one must pull that sort of guff, one might at least take pains and do it with art. Among "all the folks" whom Mame had supposed this girl knew, emperors had not been included.

XII

"YOU ain't a newspaper girl, I'll say?" Mame opened cautiously.

"Yes." The new acquaintance replenished casually the meerschaum holder.

She wrote for the papers. It was by way of being a solution of the mystery. What these Britishers called a journalist. But a four-flusher all the same. Yet Mame could not help liking her. There was something so forthcoming, something so unstudied. She was so much more natural than Paula Ling. You felt with Paula that if you knew her a hundred years she would never let you catch her with her hair down or without her pinko. But this girl was different.

"What journals you write for?"

"For a syndicate mostly."

"A syndicate." Mame blinked. Her strong financial instinct automatically got busy. "Then you pull the big stŭff, I guess?"

"Bread and butter." As the bloated pluralist spoke she took a piece from the plate in front of her and offered it delicately to Fu Ching Wei.

The haughty animal suspiciously curled a lip and then condescended to eat. "Nice, isn't he?" His mistress tickled gently the top of his head.

"Describe coronations for Reuter's Agency?" Mame threw out a feeler. The subject fascinated her. And though the mistress of Fu Ching Wei might be a palpable bluffer, there was still a chance that she was one of the mandarins of the profession into which Mame herself was dying to force an entrance.

Awe was in Mame's voice as she asked the question. Awe there was none in the careless voice that answered it. "Describe any old toomarsh from a dog fight to a royal marriage. Not that one does those stunts often, although one gets about the world sometimes."

"What's your line, then?" Mame tried hard to mask her curiosity. But rather conspicuously she failed.

"As a rule I write up the tea shops and hat shops and the restaurants and the big stores. And I do the books and plays for the women's illustrateds."

"But you do the big marriages too, I guess?" Mame's voice throbbed.

"Not often. All marriages are so much alike they bore one."

Mame's expressive countenance showed that she could not imagine herself being bored by doing marriages. "I'd just love that."

"Love what?" The girl tickled the ear of Fu Ching Wei with the meerschaum holder.

"I'd love to do the real class marriages for real class papers."

The girl gave a shrug that Paula Wyse Ling would

never have permitted herself. But natural elegance carried it off.

Was she still putting it over on her? Or was she just trying to cheek her? Not that it mattered. Even if she was a regular queen of bluffers, she was also by a long sight the most interesting creature Mame had yet found in London.

So far the girl had left to Mame the business of asking questions. But in spite of an air of nonchalance, which Mame rather admired, she was not above putting one or two questions of her own.

"Are you a writing person?" she said, offering Fu Ching Wei a little milk in a saucer.

"You said it." Of all the reams Mame had written since trekking east hardly a line had found its way into print; but that did not prevent her taking pride in the fact that the pen was her vocation. She hesitated a moment. Then she opened her bag and produced a card.

By now she knew enough of the newspaper walks of Britain to doubt the worth of this bit of pasteboard. At first it had given her real pleasure to display it. But she had now reached the phase when she was not sure that her card was not where she got off.

Still, there was nothing to lose by shooting it upon this girl. It would be trying it, as it were, upon the dog. This smart skirt was the top of her class. No matter what she might be, she was just as full of style as she could hold. It would be worth while to note the effect of a rather doubtful talisman upon her.

She did not say so, nor did her manner betray the fact, but it was a sure thing that she had never heard of Cowbarn or its leading newspaper. But Mame liked the kind and friendly way she handed back the card with the remark: "You're in journalism too, I see."

No lugs. No frills. By her own account she was a he-one at the game. It had been Mame's instinct to doubt that, but this tone of pleasant quietness, this we're-all-friends-round-the-darned-old-inkpot style was something new. This bird who was dressed to the nines, and who behaved as if she just naturally owned London, seemed to be quite disarmed by the European Correspondent of the Cowbarn *Independent*.

Without getting gay or in any wise familiar, she became as chatty as if she and Mame had begun their young lives together at the same convent school. It was clear that Mame had aroused her interest. The questions she put were shrewd and the answers she received amused her.

Mame asked if she knew the States.

She got over there sometimes. "Great fun, the U. S., I always think. Don't you?"

Mame had never found the land of her fathers great fun, but she had far too much pride in it to say so.

"The U. S. is so progressive."

"You said it."

The girl had a lot to say of America. And every word was well disposed, without any touch of condescension.

"Stay, I guess, with the Vanderbilts and the Astors

when you visit New York?" Mame threw a plummet to bring her down to cases.

"The MacFarlanes are my particular friends." She spoke off-handedly. "And they always give one such a good time."

"I'll say, yes," Mame remarked drily. She was not quite clear in her mind whether the madam could be allowed to get away with that. She would be saying next that in London her headquarters were Buckingham Palace.

The girl produced a cigarette case. It was a wonderful piece of chinoiserie in flowered purple silk. "Have a gasper?"

Mame had yet to acquire the habit of smoking gaspers. She declined with thanks. But the girl fitted an amber-scented one to the meerschaum holder so elegantly, that Mame decided to practise the art at the first opportunity. Paula Ling had said that it was even more chic in Europe than it was on Long Island. As usual Paula Ling was right.

While Mame, out of the corners of a pair of very seeing eyes, marked all that the smart piece did, she took a resolve to start in at once to develop her own personality. Here was terrific personality. It did not in any sense obtrude; it did not sort of hit you right in the middle of the eye, as Paula's did, but it was there all the time. Moreover, it was earning dividends for its owner. This skirt was not in the true sense of the word a looker, but there was jazz in her talk, in her actions, in all her ways. She did not paint her face,

use lip-stick or bead her eyes; in clothes, although Mame guessed they were as good as could be got for money, she was quiet; but her general effect was as salt as a breeze from the sea. Mame could but envy and admire and wonder how the trick was done.

"Staying long in England?"

"I'll have to get off this side of the world pretty soon now." Mame spoke a little wistfully.

Without seeming to look at Mame, the girl, from behind the rampart of the meerschaum holder, must somehow have read the true index to her feelings. That index was Mame's eyes. Very good eyes they were; and, unknown to their owner, singularly expressive. Grey eyes, large, serious, open, full of trouble. For all the orbs behind the meerschaum holder were so impersonal, when as now they were three-quarters lidded, they had a power of seeing into things that might have astonished Mame considerably had she known the full extent of their faculty.

"Anything I can do for you?"

It was one British journalist to one American or *vice versa:* a bit of international courtesy. But to Mame it was more. There was a genuine ring of kindness, as pure a note of music as Mame had yet heard.

Her practical mind at once got busy. This might be a chance. Bluffer as this girl most likely was, there could yet be no harm in trying her out.

"Before I go back home," said Mame, tentative as a kitten treading on ice, "I'd like an invite to some

mansion of real class. I'd like to do a big wedding for my paper."

"Do you mean this function next week at Clanborough House?" The girl was journalist enough to own a mind which could move with uncommon nimbleness.

"You've made it in one." Quick in the uptake, this bird. Mame was moved to say so.

"My dear Watson, really quite simple." The meerschaum holder received a Sherlock Holmes tilt. "George Rex and Consort are going to honour the occasion. You saw it in the *Times* this morning."

Mame breathed hard. This girl was no slouch. A four-flusher, yet she might have strings to pull. And it would be one over on Paula Ling if a little hick from Cowbarn, Iowa, got playing around among the royalties; not to mention the Fleet Street gentleman who had said the only way she would get to Clanborough House would be as a hired girl. The insult still rankled.

"A dull affair!" The new friend butted pleasantly into a rather tense pause. "But I ought to have a card somewhere that may get you in, if you care to come."

Mame's heart seemed to miss a beat when the girl began a search for an invitation to the terribly beparagraphed wedding the following week at Clanborough House.

"Should be one here." Calmly she produced the beautiful cigarette case. Something leapt in Mame's

throat as the entire contents of the case were toppled out on to the tablecloth. There were half a dozen cigarettes and twice that number of cards of various shapes and sizes.

"Private view Black-and-white Exhibition, Burlington House." Mame was seething with suspense, but the girl went calmly and leisurely through the cards. "Arts and Handicrafts Exhibition. Admit Bearer. British and Foreign Bible Society. Randal Cantuar in the Chair. Opening of Royal School of Cookery, New Wandsworth. Annual Meeting Dumb Friends' League. Reception for Dr. Hyam Baines Pennefather, Baltimore Third Church, Hotel Cecil. No—yes—no. It almost looks as if we've drawn zero."

Mame's heart sank. It was no more than was to be expected of a tinhorn, but it would have been crackerjack to have sailed into Clanborough House by the main entrance, along with the King and Queen and half the real doughnuts in the island.

She bit her lip with disappointment, yet at the back of her mind was the knowledge that these things did not happen. They were too good to be true. But the melancholy privilege still remained to one who aspired to close and accurate observation of the human comedy of seeing what the four-flusher would do next.

The girl coolly returned the contents to the lovely silk case. And then she said in that casual tone which Mame was now beginning to resent rather more than she admired: "Give me your address."

Part of her bluff, of course. Still Mame saw no reason why her address should not be given. Truth to tell, she was just a little proud of it. Like many things in this queer city, it sounded better than it was. She promptly took from her bag a decidedly professional-looking reporter's note-book, tore out a leaf, and then wrote carefully with an equally professional-looking fountain pen: Miss Amethyst Du Rance, Fotheringay House, Montacute Square, Bloomsbury.

"Thanks," said the smart skirt. Then she gave a glance, cool and impassive, at what Mame had written; and, then, with a lurking smile, which Mame was quick to detect, she added this memento to the others which adorned her case.

"I'll be glad of an invite for Clanborough House," said Mame with irony.

"Right-o. You shall have one in the course of post."

"I don't think," Mame confided mutely to the dregs of her teacup. And then she said with a demure mockery that was rooted in the heart's bitterness, "I reckon you'll be there.

The answer was "Sure" in the way it is given in New York. Perhaps the high-flyer guessed that Mame was trying to call her bluff. Yet beyond a doubt she carried it off royally. "I suppose I'll have to be."

"To write a report for your syndicate." Mame's voice had something terribly like a sneer in it.

The girl laughed and shook her head. "This binge is a bit too much of a family affair."

"Oh!" said Mame inadequately. It was not easy to call the bluff of this girl.

While Mame, who had now begun to feel vindictive, was seriously considering the best means of letting this short-sport know that she was not quite such a sucker as she seemed, a young man who had just risen from an adjacent table came stalking her stealthily from behind. He patted her on the shoulder.

"Hulloa, Bill!" The tone was very light and whimsical. "I didn't see the cat bring you in."

Mame listened keenly for Bill's answer. But it amounted to nothing beyond a cheery laugh. All the same, she was mightily interested in Bill.

He was dressed to beat the band: braided morning coat, white spats, the last word in neckties. Evidently a regular fellow. He was one of those upstanding, handsome boys in which the West End of London seems to abound. Perhaps he was twenty-seven, or a little less, with a skin naturally fair burnt to a most attractive shade of copper by the suns of foreign climes. There was something so wholesome and clean, so manly and trim about Bill, that even a girl of sense might be expected to fall in love with him on sight. Mame was not in a position to think of love. But he looked such a white man, and so faultless in his grace that even as it was she could not repress a little sigh of envy. Some girls didn't appreciate their luck in having boys of that sort feeding from the hand.

"Going?" Mame heard him say.

The queen of the four-flushers answered with an

unmistakable "Yep" which might have come from the Bowery. She went on to discard her cigarette, to put away her meerschaum holder and then to examine the inside of her purse. "Dammitall!" she said. "No change and I must leave a shilling under the plate for the waiter. Have you one about you, Bill?"

Bill obliged. The girl laid the shilling under her plate and got up from the table. As she did so she turned abruptly to Mame and held out her hand in a most winning manner. "A-rivederci. I have your address. I won't forget that card. So glad to have met you."

While Mame returned doubtful thanks for a favour she did not expect to receive, the girl and her escort were already under way. With mingled feelings Mame watched them pass along the line of tables. She saw the girl blow a kiss to the old woman with the Roman nose, who in return offered a most truculent scowl. But this was effaced by the homage of the *maître d'hôtel,* who bestowed upon the girl an exaggerated bow. Moreover, as she made a smiling progress down the long room, many eyes seemed to follow her; or, as Mame was inclined to think, the eyes of the feminine section of the tea-drinking public were drawn by the escort Bill.

Indeed, as a pair they were distinctly "it" as they went along to the door. The girl stopped at several tables just to pass the time of day, while Bill stood by like a big and amiable Newfoundland dog.

Mame sighed again. Yes, some skirts had luck!

Up till that moment she had not realised the possibilities in writing for the newspapers. She would get no card, of course, for Clanborough House. But she was already resigned to that. Birds of that sort were much too busy paddling their private canoes. And why not? You simply got nowhere if you didn't.

When the girl finally went out through the doors at the end of the room Mame was sure that she had seen and heard the last of her. That was the way of the world as already she had come to understand it. The big cities were chock-full of interesting folks, but unless you were just-so it was not worth while to take you up.

To be worth while, that was the open sesame to New York and London. Paula Ling had grasped that truth. That was why she was a mass of paint and powder and patchouli; that was why she screwed herself like a manikin, into tight smart clothes. But this skirt left Paula standing. The Paulas of life, for all their brains and their will-power, could not live five minutes with this sort of girl, who had every new trick, and who, like Cinquevalli the famous conjurer, was so expert she could almost do them shut-eye.

So much was Mame occupied with these thoughts that it was not until she had paid her bill and was out once more upon the cold pavement of Pall Mall that she gave herself a mental shake. She was a fool. Had she kept her wits about her she would at least have asked the waiter the name of this queen among four-flushers.

XIII

MAME had quite made up her mind that she would not receive an invitation to the wedding reception at Clanborough House. Why should she? That the girl would prove as good as her word was not on the cards. Such a promise was no more than a slick Londoner's way of showing how much she was in it, without really being quite so much in it as she showed.

After all, however, it is a funny world. And this was Mame's reflection, when rather late the following afternoon, the little maid, whose name was Janet, handed her a large, square, important-looking envelope that had just come by post. At the sight of the coronet on the back and the general air of quality Mame's heart gave a jump.

The unexpected had happened. Her Grace the Duchess of Clanborough requested the honour—requested the honour, mark you!—of the company of Miss Amethyst Du Rance at the marriage of the Marquis of Belfield with her niece Miss Van Alsten at St. Margaret's, Westminster, at three o'clock on Thursday, April 6, and afterwards at Clanborough House, Mayfair.

It was very odd. But it was distinctly thrilling. There was no need to be so humble after all. The girl

evidently was interested in Miss Du Rance and had gone out of her way to do her a service. And Miss Du Rance did not mind owning that she had been a little too ready to suspect her of not being on the level.

With a sensation of deep but quiet triumph Mame listened now to the tabbies faintly purring over their teacups. It called for self-control not to ask the arch-puss, who gave herself out a bishop's niece, upon whom Mame had an especial down, whether she was going to the ceremony at St. Margaret's or to the reception at Clanborough House, or whether she meant to do both? —although privately quite sure that the old stiff was going to do neither. Happily she remembered a text of the village preacher in the grim days when she had to endure him every Sunday: "Be not exalted lest ye be cast down."

In spite of a glow in the centre of her being, the warning in those words could not have been more salutary. So fully had Clanborough House been dismissed from Mame's thoughts that she had already made up her mind to quit London as soon as possible. In fact, she had just informed Mrs. Toogood that she would not require a room beyond Saturday; and she had decided to go immediately after breakfast to-morrow morning, Wednesday, to book a second-class berth in the *Vittoria,* which was to sail three days later for New York.

The invitation to Clanborough House looked like changing all that. It rather set Mame on the horns of a dilemma. A girl truly wise would stick to the

plan she had made, the voice of prudence told her. Clanborough House would probably mean another fortnight in London; it would involve her in a new hat and other expense; and if she was not careful such a hole would be cut in her purse that alarmingly few dollars would remain in it by the time she found herself back on Broadway.

These reflections gave Mame a jolt. A lot of use an invite to Clanborough House, if the price of it brought you to your uppers. Aunt Lou's legacy would be gone, along with the hundred and ten dollars she had been able to save. Her job would be lost. And in a place like New York it was no certainty that she would get another at short notice. She had heard it described by those who should know as the cruelest place on earth for persons who were up against it.

These were problems. Invitation in hand, Mame fiercely considered them. Should she? Or should she not? The famous highbrow William Shakespeare, according to the office calendar whose mottoes she had by heart, the famous highbrow William Shakespeare had made the statement that "there is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune."

It might be so. That was true, no doubt, for some. But again, for others it was quite likely not to be true. Circumstances alter cases. William Shakespeare was writing in the spacious days of Queen Elizabeth when there were not so darn many go-getters around. In his time there were not more people than jobs and all the

seats in the public parks of the big cities were not overflowing with those who couldn't raise the price of a meal.

A problem, sure. On the one hand, prudence, foresight, a looking-before-and-after; on the other, ambition, hope, adventure, all the worth-while things. Such a chance would never recur. And if she had brain enough to use it in the right way, there was no saying where it might lead.

Mame spent a very restless night. But somewhere in the small hours, when her mind was at its most lucid, she took the momentous decision to follow her star.

If she turned back now, with the gates of her kingdom opening wide, she never deserved to see them again. "Stick it, Mame." That had always been her slogan, even in the cold hour of sun-up before the day's work began or over a guttering candle after it was done, when secretly she gave her whole mind to the hard and dry study of stenography.

It was that power of giving her whole mind to things that in the end had won freedom. If she had taken a line of least resistance or been afraid to go all out for the things she wanted, she would still have been doing chores upon the farm. No, she must stand up to her luck. And if the worst came she could go home steerage.

Full of new resolve, Mame's first act was to inform Mrs. Toogood that she proposed to stay on at least another week. Then, after an elaborate calculation of ways and means, she set out on a tour of Oxford

Street. A new hat she must have. When in Rome, etc. No use looking a frump at Clanborough House. She would be mixing with class. And if she was careful how she dressed and she watched her step all the time, the folks might not be able to tell her from real.

A quiet mode was best suited to Miss Amethyst Du Rance. After much observation of herself and other people, that was her conclusion. Like most of her countrywomen she had a flair in the matter of clothes. New York and London had taught her their value. Already she was getting to know the worth of the mysterious attribute, style.

The girl she had met at the Carlton was a revelation of what style could do. It was a far better thing than mere looks. But Mame's ambition was to have both. And if she could only fulfil it, there was no reason, so far as she could see, why she should not unlock the most exclusive doors in Britain.

At all events, it should not be for want of trying. If the invite to Clanborough House meant anything it was that she had found a bonanza. The girl must be a regular high-flyer, and for some mysterious reason, which Mame could not fathom, she was willing to be a fairy godmother. It was up to Mame to prove her own mettle. Here, at last, was a chance to pull the big stuff.

Many hours in Oxford Street were necessary before Mame's prudence could decide just how much to be bled. She had to get home, if, in spite of Clanborough

House, the stars in their courses played her false. After she had duly paid for the hat on which she had set her heart, and a captivating fox so near real that she fell for it at the last moment, she was quite alarmed by the narrow margin of safety.

At the end of the day she wrote an urgent letter to the editor of the Cowbarn *Independent*. She told him how disappointed she was not to have had a line all the time she had been in Europe. And she hinted that a few dollars in exchange for the fifteen columns she had already sent him would be welcome.

But what was the *Independent* anyway? At best a fourth-rate sheet, a small-town rag. She would forget it. The time had surely come to fly at higher game.

She tore up the letter to Elmer Dobree. His treatment was so mean he was not worth a twopenny stamp. Let her get into touch with the big live papers of New York, Philadelphia, Chicago. Yes, the idea was good. She was full of good ideas, yet they didn't seem to click.

What was wrong? Her stuff was O. K., she was sure. Full of jazz, unlike what other columnists were pulling. Yet editors didn't fall. In New York she had not been able to get them so much as to look at what she wrote; it was the same in London. Influence was what she needed. Paula Ling was a one for influence. She believed in it all the time. But it had a mystic quality. Nobody knew just what it was or how you came by it.

Personality was the key. Modern journalising was like being in vaudeville or in the movies. You had to do stunts; you had to be a good mixer; able if necessary to jolly an editor into taking an interest in you; above all, you had to be up in the art of what in London they called dressing the shop window.

As slowly she tore up the letter to Elmer P. she sighed deeply. Even he had deserted her. Well, never say die, that was still her motto. She must hang on by the eyelids to the bitter end. But she felt so sore with one whose friendship she had built on that she snatched his photograph from her bedroom chimneypiece and consigned it to her trunk. The stronger for the deed, she then resumed that optimistic pen which had yet to earn a dime in Europe and began a carefully diplomatic letter to Paula Wyse Ling.

Out and out go-getter though Paula was, Mame valued her friendship. To be sure, it had only been manifested in small and considered ways. Paula was essentially a girl who didn't give without taking; if she shared her bread with you, she would expect you to share your jam with her. But Mame didn't blame her for that. Paula, too, had had a long way to go. She had started out at sixteen without a buck from what she alluded to as "a comic village in the State of Maine." By sheer grit and the power of sticking it she had earned enough by her pen to spend two years in Europe. And now since her return home she was pulling five hundred a month, with every prospect of going bigger.

Diplomacy was needed to handle the Paula Lings of the world. Mame kept this truth before her as her pen drove steadily on. She painted a rosy picture of her life in London. If not exactly what these Cockneys themselves would call "a Brock's Benefit," in other words, a firework display, she was already beginning to fix the half-nelson on various editors of distinction who paid a fair price per col. Also she was getting around a good deal with the worth-while folks. Her friend the Duchess of Clanborough had just sent her a special invite to a wedding ceremony and to the reception afterwards, which the King and Queen had promised to attend. Some marquis or other was going to marry a Miss Van Alsten; but Paula was likely to know as much about it as she did, as the Miss Van Alsten in question belonged to New York.

Here it was that diplomacy entered with both feet. New York being just naturally interested in the marriage of one of its queens with a British blood-peer, Mame would be glad to do the show from the inside, with a full description of who was there, how they looked, what they wore, and so on; and if Paula could fix it her end with some editor or some syndicate of editors, she would be happy to divide the cheque. Time being money, she hoped Paula would save on it by promptly cabling terms.

As Mame cast an eye over this letter, it seemed an inspiration to write Paula Ling and offer her fifty-fifty of the dough. If Paula couldn't place the first-hand

account of next week's marriage, it was not likely there was one alive who could. With a sly smile Mame addressed the envelope to Paula's apartment on Sixty-seventh Street. Then she slipped out and placed it carefully in the little red pillar box at the British Museum end of Montacute Square.

XIV

THURSDAY was to be the day of days. But the evening of Wednesday after a week of east winds, having settled into reasonably spring-like weather, Mame decided to give her new hat and fox an airing. It would take off a little of the shine; besides, she was burning to know how she looked and felt in things that had taxed her purse to capacity.

Distinction, personality, taste, style, were the watch-words humming in her rather excited brain as she posed before the cracked mirror in her bedroom. This hat and fox had cost thirty-five berries in hard cold cash. And there was nothing much to show. Yet the fox looked so nearly like a fox for the money as it adorned her slim neck and the hat set off her shapely little head so well, that they gave her quite a tone. She would have to travel steerage now, but it was worth it. Thirty-five dollars' worth of hat and fur did give you a feeling of Class.

Lured by the fineness of the evening Mame went as far as Hyde Park. When Bus 29 set her down at the Marble Arch the clock upon it said twenty minutes past five. The promise of night was in the sky already. There were few people to observe Mame's tasteful finery as she sauntered past the long line of empty chairs

which ran the entire length of Park Lane as far as Apsley House.

Hard by a statue whose naïveté gave Mame a jolt, she turned off to the right and crossed the forsaken tan of Rotten Row. And in so doing her movements, unknown to herself, attracted the notice of two policemen, who were standing on duty in the shadow of the trees.

She took a seat, one of the many provided gratis by a paternal County Council for the worthy citizens of London, England. No one else was sitting around. There was excellent reason for their absence, although Mame did not know it. But she was about to be put wise.

The path by whose edge Mame innocently sat was the most charming in London. It ran from Piccadilly to Kensington Gore and there was a time, not so long ago, when it was much frequented by people who knew what was what. *Autres temps, autres mœurs.* People who knew what was what were particularly careful now to keep the other side the park railings. Better be splashed from head to heel by the bounding taxi or the plebeian bus, better be jostled by a heedless mob, than to take a chance of being run in.

The zealots of the Metropolitan Force had closed London's most alluring path to all people of sense, but Mame did not know that. And she was not to blame. But just one other there was among all the millions of Cockaigne who at that moment appeared to share her ignorance. Blame in his case is a delicate question.

Truly a rather wonderful old bird. He was of the

sort to be seen only in cathedral cities, and then but one at a time; always providing that some many-and-portentous-syllabled conference is not in session when this rare bird may be seen in his battalions.

In this case he was solus. Far wiser he, had his lady wife or some authentic church-worker accompanied him from St. James's Vicarage, where he had been to call upon the incumbent, to the chapter house at Knightsbridge. His like are the natural prey of those who lurk at dusk in the shrubberies of Hyde Park. There was something in his shovel hat, all rosetted and beribanded, in his decent black apron, in the neat many-buttoned gaiters which set off his comely legs that no self-respecting London policeman could resist. He did not seem to know that, this adventurous old boy. Or perhaps feeling himself to be like Cæsar's wife he was so foolhardy as not to worry.

Mame had just taken her seat under the trees which grace the Forbidden Path. She was wondering how awfully well she must look in her new hat and fox, how full of lugs and yet of quietness, in a word, how exceedingly Class; she was wondering, too, how she could best develop her personality, so that London, England, should know her for what she was—one of the bright intellects of the U. S.—when cheu! this perfectly amazing old lady of the village came into her ken.

He did more than come into her ken; he filled the entire range of her vision. Fully absorbed in his recent heart-to-heart talk with the liberal-minded friends he had left at the Vicarage, he was not conscious that

Mame was there. As for Mame, the mere contiguity of this old john charmed her to a smile.

That smile was Mame's undoing. Thoughts on style and personality banished for the nonce, her eyes were fixed on the slowly receding form of the Moderator of the Metropolitan First Church of London, England, or its equivalent, when two policemen, young, rampant, red-haired, sprang from the bushes. They lacked the irresponsibility of the glad Irish peelers who lend such zip to New York. These charming fellows happened to be Scots. But they had their way to make in the wicked Saxon world. Here was their chance.

"Did he speak to ye?" demanded the First Cop in a hoarse, stern tone.

The sudden onset of the police brought up Mame with a round turn. She had read that the homely London bobby was the admiration of the civilised world. So far, she was bound to own, she liked him. He was human and kindly, simple and bland. But to have the wind put up in this manner by a brace of raw Scots was a bit too much. For the moment she felt quite flustered.

"Come again." Her drawl was rather startled. "I don't get you."

"Why was ye giving him the glad eye?" Thus the Second Cop. And he seemed to add to Mame's perplexity.

A moment's thought was fuel for a growing indignation. Dating from Detective Addelsee's bad break she was going to have a down on cops of all

nationalities for the rest of her days. In spite of their air of fanaticism, which was more than a little dangerous, this pair of boobs was unmistakably "for it"—as the English say.

"I'm a very respectable girl."

Both constables had a sneer for Mame's respectability.

"Oh, run away and play," she advised. "Run away to Mamma."

It may have been Mame's coolness, the growing truculence of her eyes, the scorn of her lips, or her choice of words, but the two zealots began sensibly to draw in their horns.

Personality, no doubt. For as soon as the owner of the new hat and fox could bring her guns into action the Force had an attack of pause.

"Beat it. Hop it." The grey eyes flashed. "Don't you dare get gay with me."

Z 9 and Z 23 retired a few paces and conferred. A moment later they were fading discreetly away in the twilight.

Mame was left mistress of the field. But the incident rankled. Why could not a peaceful American citizeness enjoy the beauty of the evening and develop her personality without being shoved around in this way?

She heard the clocks of the neighbourhood chime six. And then, still ruffled, she left her seat and slowly made her way across the park towards bus Route 29. Alas! she had not gone far when she overtook a couple of

elegant tunics. They were strolling twenty yards or so ahead, but even at this distance they were familiar.

On the inspiration of the moment she quickened her pace. Hearing a scrunch of footsteps on the gravel path, one of the cops half turned to look at her as she came up.

"Say, officer!" Mame's gasp was all excitement: she would have known that sandy-haired, sharp-nosed rube among ten thousand of his kind. "Say, listen, officer!" An imperative hand was laid on an immaculate sleeve. "I seena mutt without his jeans."

The words were intended to convey an impression of rusticity which, if anything, was overdone. Both bobbies turned as one towards her. Upon their faces was incomprehension grave and dour.

For the credit of the Metropolitan Force, however, the Second Cop was a young man of ripe experience. In fact, he was wearing the Zeebrugge Medal. At the end of 1919 he had been paid off from the Navy, after a brief but honourable career; in the spring of 1921 he had first donned the elegant tunic with belt and whistle complete whose accomplished wearers are the admiration of the world. There was a hiatus of sixteen months in his record which had been filled by slinging hash in a Chicago eating joint. Just as soon as he was able to hitch back his mind to that glad time, and with Mame's intonation to help him, the process took rather less than thirty seconds, he knew where he was.

Emotion flamed suddenly in the eye of the Second Cop. He turned to the First Cop and spoke urgent

words. Both zealots squared their shoulders and tightened their belts.

"Whaur did ye see him?" The demand of Z 9 was tense and stern.

Mame laid a finger to her lip. "Mind you don't scare the guy."

It was a superfluous caution. Both constables looked ready to creep through an alderman's thumb ring without making a sound.

Mame turned left. Her escort followed. The ground was admirably chosen. Immediately in front was a small newspaper kiosk, now padlocked for the night; and just beyond was that work of art, in all its naïveté, which had lately administered a shock to Mame's moral nature.

Her forefinger drew a bead on the guilty object. "You better take that bo and put him in the pen."

The boobs did not muster half a smile between them.

"Don't be silly!" Z 9 spoke severely. "Don't ye knaw that's the Ache-iles Statcher?"

"Can that!" Mame looked from one dour face to the other; her lip took its most expressive curl. "Tell King George from me I *am* surprised. Ache-iles Statcher! I'll write straight home to our Purity League."

XV

THE next morning, when Mame drew up her blind, there was abundant promise of royal weather. The great day was ushered in by one of those light mists which mask a sky of flawless blue. In London, England, this phenomenon is rarely seen before noon. But when it does appear the whole of that world which lies between the White Stone Pond at Hampstead and Sydenham Hill, with its weird crown, the Crystal Palace, may be said to raise a pæan.

This morning as Mame dealt faithfully with her matutinal kipper and coffee and marmalade, she felt inclined to raise a pæan also. She had slept well in spite of a growing pressure of deep anxieties. Never had she felt more full of zip. To-day was to offer the chance of her life.

The firmness of the barometer and the optimism of the *Daily Mail* so fully confirmed the prospect from her bedroom window, that a second consecutive day of fine weather was almost a certainty. She would be able to do the function of the afternoon under the best possible conditions.

For nearly a fortnight the wedding had been sedulously boomed by the newspapers. Mame was willing to take their word for it that the celebration of the

nuptials of the Marquis of Belfield and Miss Van Alsten of New York was one of the events of the social year. Also she was ready to accept their prediction of an immense gathering at the Church of Saint Margaret, Westminster, and around the railings of Clanborough House, Mayfair.

She decided to forego the ceremony and to concentrate on the reception. By this means she would save the expense of a taxi; and perhaps of fighting her way through the mob. New York had taught her what that meant at a really smart wedding. Besides, having had such luck, she was sure of seeing the second part of the show at close range. If she got to Clanborough House early, she would be able to choose a good position. She wanted to rub shoulders with Royalty and the grandees. It was not so much she was a little snob, although she dared say that really and truly she was, as that she was out to hear and to see, to mark and to learn.

She didn't take much luncheon. A sort of excitement had been gnawing at her all the morning, and the nearer the time approached to set out for Mayfair, the worse it became. She would have despised herself for lack of coolness had she been equal just then to despising herself for anything. What was there to fuss over? Had it been her fool self that was going to marry the Marquis of Belfield she could not have felt more completely cuckoo.

"Pull your doggone self together, Mame Durrance,"

something whispered to her as she shook a little Worcester sauce over the mid-day hash.

Sound advice, but not easy to follow. Even when she put down the bottle of Worcester sauce her hand continued to shake. Yes, she was cuckoo. A highbrow had declared in the office calendar for 1921 that he was the captain of his soul. His exact words should have been easy to remember, for they had been learned sedulously by heart; but the poor old think-box seemed out of business just now. And that was a pity, for that highbrow might have been helpful.

Lack of appetite seemed to add to a feeling of "nerves." It was absurd. Her job would not be a whit more difficult than a visit to the movies or the play. But she was in a regular twitter. Luncheon hardly touched, she got up from the table and went to her room. The business of dressing took a full hour. Never in her life had she taken such pains with her appearance. She arched her eyebrows with a pencil, she dabbed her face with cream and rose and she artfully brushed her hair, a pretty burnished brown, over what she considered her weakest feature, a pair of slightly nondescript ears.

At last she stood in her camisole to receive her best afternoon frock of blue marocain. Then she slipped about her slender neck a string of pearls even slenderer, whose make-believe, she hoped, would not be visible to the naked eye. Silk stockings, very choice and gossamer, and a cunning pair of shoes with high heels and large buckles completed the picture.

As she gazed at herself in the wretched lodging-house mirror, she wondered why she was taking these pains. Not a soul in the smart mob was likely to glance at her twice. But she looked so pale that she could not tear herself away from the glass without one extra touch of rose. That accomplished, she had recourse to a neat oblong box, which since yesterday morning had graced the top of the chest of drawers. With a little nervous thrill she produced a pair of folding eyeglasses, the cutest thing out, which with the help of a long tortoise-shell handle you held up to your nose.

The only drawback to this slick contrivance was that for seeing purposes she simply did not need it. Her eyes were like a goshawk's. The problem was to hold the tortoise-shell folders so as to peer over the top without detracting from their effect.

Conscious that she was a veritable Paula Wyse Ling in action, she moved slowly forth from her room and down the stairs. The tightness of the new shoes required caution. It was a mistake to have them fit so close; a pity, too, that the heels were so horribly high. She had to be careful also with the tortoise-shell folders. If they were not kept at just the right angle going down those dark stairs she might miss a step, pitch down the lot and fetch up with a crash against the drawing-room door.

Fashionable life is not all chocolate éclairs and ice-cream sodas. Mame nearly tripped over herself twice in the course of the perilous descent to the first-floor landing. She had just achieved it with a thankful

heart, when the door of the drawing-room opened, and lo! who should emerge like some old cat from a wicker basket but the queen of the tabbies, the bishop's niece.

No love was lost between Mame and this lady. She was a species of four-flusher, Mame was sure. Very set up with herself, yet without so much as one shilling to rub against another. To judge by the novels Mame had been reading, to get to know as it were the lie of this comic land, she was convinced that in the cathedral towns and the inland spas the nieces of bishops were three a penny.

She had dignity of a sort, this dame, but when she came full upon Mame, who seemed at the point of falling on to her tortoise-shell folders, she almost let a whoop.

Howbeit, the fact that she was a bishop's niece had the power to save her. Suddenly she gazed over Mame's head and then muttered how glad she was that it was such a fine day. But Mame, in spite of tight shoes and a general *malaise,* felt the cold and stern joy of battle.

By a discreet use of the tortoise-shell folders she was able to peer not so much through the middle as over the top. Then she lifted her good chin, which she knew to be one hundred per cent American, and said in that clear high voice which she had practised in secret from the hour she had first heard poor Mr. Falkland Vasasour put it over, "I'll give your mother-love to King George."

XVI

THERE was no need to hurry over the business of getting to Clanborough House. In fact, Mame had intended to walk, but the new shoes were so tight that she hailed the first taxi she saw. Instead, however, of giving the sublime address, she prudently said Selfridge's. She had been over the line of route already. Clanborough House was an easy five minutes on foot from that famous store; it would cost less and consume a certain amount of time, of which there was more than enough, if she walked the remainder of the distance. A gentle stroll, moreover, would help her to get on terms with her fashionable self.

At Selfridge's she discharged her taxi. Then growing more collected every yard, in spite of the pinching of her shoes, she quietly sauntered through a series of by-streets until she turned a corner and came upon the sign Clanborough Street W.1.

Here she was. At once she descried an awning in the middle distance. The awning was striped red and white. It stretched from the kerb, across the pavement, beyond the railings, along a kind of paved courtyard, and finally merged in the sombre stonework of a gloomy building, a sort of cross between a workhouse and a

penitentiary, which since the year of grace 1709 had borne the name of Clanborough House.

Beneath the awning's entire length ran a red carpet. Mame was so early, it was hardly likely that the first guests would be back from the church within the next half hour. That was her own calculation, which she was careful to verify by the watch on her wrist and also by the clock on the adjacent church tower of St. Sepulchre. But the wedding-going public had assembled already; not merely in twos and threes but in fair-sized battalions. The Metropolitan police had assembled also; not in twos and threes either, but a round thirty or so good-humoured and efficient men, who, subject to their own little vagaries, as Mame was in a position to bear witness, were yet past masters in handling clotted masses of the British cit.

This pleasant afternoon of early spring they were all out to do their job with grace and skill. They had drawn a cordon round Clanborough House and its environs. As Mame came up she observed that privileged beings armed with cameras were in the middle of the road. This caused her some slight regret that she had not driven up to the awning in style and had the door opened by a policeman. It was reasonably certain that she would have been the first guest to arrive and would therefore have been a good subject for the camera. With a bit of luck the new hat and fox might have found their way into the New York papers.

It seemed a pity to have missed that chance. Life,

however, still held one or two agreeable things. One of these was the fact that the first policeman to challenge her progress, when in order to dissociate herself from the crowd she stepped off the sidewalk and took to the roadway, was no less than that identical young cop whom she had met the previous evening in Hyde Park.

Life is full of gay surprises. For Mame at this moment it was a delicious affair. To be stopped by that veritable baby in the broad light of day, to be accosted before the multitude, and to be politely requested not to walk in the road was about as good a thing as could have happened to her. The sight of the dour but well-cut features, of the sandy hair and the unsmiling face filled her at once with the joy that warriors feel.

Now that the big moment had come she was no longer cuckoo. Like any other American citizeness she was reacting just naturally to the occasion. The sight of that policeman, the sound of his voice, removed the last trace of stage fright.

"Ye can't walk along hair, miss."

"Why not?"

"Unless ye've a ticket for the r-r-reception."

Torn between an ambition to behave like a peeress and a powerful desire to put one over on the constable, the wearer of the new hat and fox opened her vanity bag and haughtily produced her invite.

The young bobby, at the sight of that magic bit of pasteboard and with the eyes of many superior officers

upon him, drew himself to his full height and saluted the new hat and fox as only a Scots policeman could have done.

Coolly and with fixity of mind, Mame went through some warlike evolutions with her tortoise-shell folders. A whole series of evolutions. She seemed to detect all about her a sudden joyous clicking of cameras. Her picture was going to be in the New York papers after all.

It was the proudest moment life so far had given her. But she was equal to it. Now that she was fairly in at the deep end, the springs of being seemed automatically to tighten up. She was going to swim. And she was going to swim all the better for having so recently distrusted the power of her breast stroke and the freedom of her leg action.

The eyes of the world were upon the tortoise-shell folders. In Paula Wyse Ling's opinion there was nothing like them. Paula was right as usual. Mame was conscious of the gaze of the *Daily-Lyre*-consuming public growing rounder and rounder. She could almost hear the suckers asking, Which Little Nob Is This?

XVII

MAME'S progress to the awning was a triumph. Bobby after bobby passed her along. Once she was fairly under it and she felt the red carpet beneath her high-heeled shoes, of whose perils she was still aware, she bent her mind to the serious business of being Lady Clara de Vere.

Everything seemed to make that business easy. From admiring public and saluting cops in the street, to groom of the chambers, major domo, butlers, footmen and what not in the mansion itself, all were careful to see that she didn't step out of the picture. Never in her life had she felt so exhilarated as she walked on very slowly towards the white marble staircase.

There was plenty of time to look at the Lawrences and the Romneys. She was the first guest to arrive. The others, who were evidently a most distinguished crowd, were all at the church. Except for the servants she seemed to have the whole place to herself.

If she had not had a good nerve those jolly old hirelings might have put one over on her. They were all male; very numerous, very starched, very stand-off; in fact, they were reeking with Class. She had not seen any hired men to compare with these.

The house was exactly like those fake interiors you

see on the movies, except that this one was real. It might have been a royal palace. She had never been anywhere like it. As she walked alone and delicately up that wonderful staircase she could hardly believe in her surroundings. Equally hard to believe in herself. Mame Durrance must be dreaming.

In a sense she was dreaming. Halfway up the stairs she paused to drive home to herself that she was the Lady Clara de Vere and must behave "as sich." The truth about her was that like so many of her countrywomen she had a remarkable faculty of seeing herself in pictures. She kept a mirror at the back of her brain. You glanced within and were able to adjust yourself to your environment. In the middle of those stairs the little hick from Cowbarn, Iowa, took a formal oath to be cool, to be collected, to watch her step, and, above all, to see that nobody called her bluff.

Everything so far was easy. There was not a soul on the stairs. But no, she was wrong. When she reached the head of them she came upon a rare old top in livery who bowed as they do in the theatre. He asked for her card. She handed it to him and he bayed out in a deep voice that went echoing all over the landing: "Miss Amethyst Du Rance."

Mame was quite startled by the sound of her name. Somehow it didn't seem to belong to her, any more than this ducal mansion seemed to belong to her life. She was dreaming, sure. The echoing "Miss Amethyst Du Rance" seemed to prove it. However, she decided to keep moving, just as if she were broad awake.

The landing gave on to an enormous room, whose massive double doors were thrown right back. And standing in the doorway was a tall, silver-haired dame, dressed in black and white satin, with that particular kind of fagged look which Mame had first observed in the bishop's niece and was no doubt indigenous to the upper strata of Britain.

As soon as she saw Mame, her tired features lit up in a smile.

"How do you do, Miss Du Rance?" She spoke in a fatigued voice and held out a flabby hand. "The Duchess should be here in a few minutes. You will find some of the presents in there. It may interest you to look at them."

"Sure," was Mame's answer. It was not too ready or too cordial, but rather in the dry tone that Paula Ling called *blasé,* which in Europe was always reckoned good style. Lady Clara de Vere was on in this scene, and if the skirt was to act her part her words must be few and chosen with discretion.

Lady C. de V. gave her tortoise-shell folders a shake and then passed on into the room. It was immense, and this was a happy dispensation, since it was encumbered with tables on which hundreds of presents were elaborately laid out.

Such things, however, had no particular interest for Mame. They could be seen any old day. It was the house itself and the people in it that were best worth looking at. Here was such a chance of observing the great world from the inside as might never happen

again. She must learn as much as she possibly could in the short time at her disposal.

A cursory glance at the presents was all she gave. Then she wandered away through a suite of smaller rooms, all of which were unoccupied. But they were very interesting with their richly patterned carpets wonderful to the tread; glorious tapestries upon the walls, candelabra which reminded her of certain photographs she had seen of Versailles; mirrors, pictures, bric-à-brac in rare profusion. It was freely said in England that the aristocracy had been killed by the war, but from what she saw of Clanborough House there was life in the old dog yet.

However, these things did not greatly matter. The folks were what she was really wishful to see. Therefore she soon returned to the big room. After a careful survey she fixed herself in a strategic corner which partly concealed her yet also commanded a fair view of the open doors and the broad landing and staircase beyond.

In a very few minutes the first of the folks came into view. Even without the guidance of their costumes Mame would have had no difficulty in identifying them from their pictures in the papers as the bride and bridegroom. They made a young and handsome and jolly-looking pair. Any girl might have been envious; but Mame was far too busy to indulge that mean passion.

For the folks began to pour in now with a vengeance. Among the first arrivals was a bunch of

Royalties. It was easy to tell these were the Real Cream, by the care with which they were herded into a distant corner of the room. Here they stood apart, surrounded by dames-in-waiting and sconce-bearers. From time to time some old grandee was brought up to speak to them. Almost the first of these was the old duchess with the Wellington nose whom Mame's unknown friend had claimed for a godmother. She came up leaning on a black cane and was soon in deep conversation with a particularly upstanding dame whom Mame guessed by the look of her to be the Queen of England.

Democrat though Mame was proud to consider herself, she took an undemocratic interest in all that went on. The look of the Royalties and the detached way in which they bore themselves interested her enormously. But she was not able to give them undivided attention. From her point of view other important things were beginning to happen.

By now the folks were simply swarming up the stairs. There was a loud hum of voices; a mighty lot of hand-shaking; considerable laughter; and as a mob of guests began to percolate into the room and to circulate around the tables Mame was confronted with the difficult task of picking out those who were most worth while. Plutes were so thick on the ground that it called for more than her knowledge to say who were not worth while.

Suddenly her eye was caught by a braided morning coat which somehow had a remarkably familiar look.

Where had she seen it? Which Prince was in that morning's *Daily Lyre?* Why, to be sure, it was the young fellow Bill! Which Prince was Bill? A fascinating inquiry. Before it could be answered, so swiftly swirled this human vortex, the drama became immensely more complicated. For, coming in through the door, looking just as gay, just as cool, just as chic as ever, was her chance acquaintance of the Carlton who had turned out to be a fairy godmother.

Mame's excitement mounted so oddly at the sight of this girl, whom she hardly expected to see again, that she had to restrain a shout of welcome. This dump, she reminded herself, was not the cafeteria on Second Street, Cowbarn, Iowa, but Clanborough House, Mayfair, London, England. In the words of the song the Colonel's Lady and Judy O'Grady might be sisters under their skins, but if Miss Du Rance—the fool puss! —didn't watch out, she would be tearing a large hole in the manners of Lady Clara de Vere.

Was the girl going to look towards her corner? Or was she not? It was no cert. The folks were still pouring in; royalties, senators, professional beauts. It was no snap. The girl, who was showing some fine teeth and chattering like a good one, seemed to have a word for them all.

These were anxious moments. It would be just too bad if Mame didn't catch the eye of the unknown friend. The entire future might turn upon it. She must thank her for the invitation. And this time she

must see that the fairy godmother did not get away without revealing who she was.

It began to seem, however, as if Mame would have to leave her nice, comfortable corner and go and chase her. Each moment the place was getting fuller; each moment more of the folks intervened between Mame and the quarry. The human tide surging around was slowly but surely carrying her the other way.

Mame did not want, all the same, to quit a post which so finely commanded the main doorway. But she must keep the unknown in the middle of her eye or she would lose her. However, Mame's luck was in. The girl was hustled to the right of the big table, instead of to the left, as Mame had feared that she would be.

This made all the difference. She came back on her tracks. All kinds of whales were still hanging around her. But Mame could not help that. It was now or it was never. Still, the Lady Clara de Vere did not let a whoop or a coo-ee or anything in the nature of a view holloa. Preserving a ladylike calm, that would have had no success at Cowbarn, she waved her white gloved hands and then clapped them together, one, two, three!

The girl was so engaged with her friends that the first time failed to do the trick. Repeating the performance, she clapped still louder, one, two, three! Then the fairy godmother suddenly looked Mame full in the eye. For one brief instant a kind of mild surprise shone over her and then she said quite cheerily: "It *is* sporting of you to show up here."

Miss Amethyst Du Rance took a strong pull of her young self. This scene belonged entire to Lady C. de Vere, a fact she must not forget. "Not at all," was Mame's answer. She prided herself that it was a good answer. Already she had learned that in London, England, the Cream when in doubt either said "Quite" or "Not at all."

"Can you tell me which is King George?" Mame congratulated herself that her fool mind was functioning. And if the apt question was put in a voice that at Cowbarn would have ranked as a mere whisper, even amid the spate of conversation it was fully audible.

"Not here yet," was the answer, casual but gay. "Shouldn't wonder if he's splitting a small soda with Uncle John."

"Oh!" said Mame. So cool, so unconcerned, so chaffing was the jane about it all, that from the tone of her Mame was by no means sure that she was not a royalty herself.

"I just want to thank you right from my heart, for sending me this invite."

"Jolly good of you to come." Nothing could have been lighter than the girl's tone, but in Mame's opinion nothing could have been more pleasant.

Her next remark sent her up still higher in Mame's esteem. "Would you like some tea?" The words as well as the tone were music.

"I'll say yes." Such fervour was in Mame's reply that it seemed as if Lady Clara de Vere had missed her cue.

"Come on, then. Let us go downstairs to the buffet before the mob breaks loose."

It was not easy to find a way through the crowd now blocking the large room. But under the accomplished guidance of the girl they were able to emerge into one of the smaller rooms. Thence they escaped through a private door concealed behind an imposing arras and so down an unsuspected staircase, which proved to be a short cut to a very pleasant region wherein was contained "the eats."

Mame deduced from the competence of her guide that she had the run of the place. Evidently she knew her way. "Mustn't go in there," she indicated a room to the right, whose smartly decorated tables looked particularly enticing. "That's reserved for the wallahs. Common you and me had better pile in here."

The room on the left, although less exclusive, had some good points. There were tea and cakes in profusion; also a number of snug little tables at which to enjoy them. None was yet occupied and they were able to take their pick. The one they chose was just behind the entrance door, out of the way of everybody.

"Lucky to get in before the squash," said the guide as they sat down. "Half London'll be here soon."

Hardly had a superb footman, in powder and knee-breeches, provided a tray containing not merely tea and cakes but also caviar sandwiches, when the prophecy was borne out. The small tables began rapidly to fill.

A couple of pigtails, smartly ribboned, whose owners were immensely voluble, soon commandeered the next

table to Mame's. Armed with pencils and cards they seemed to be in the middle of a mysterious game.

"Bags I the noo Murcan am-bass-a-door," the first flapper, a tall and leggy sixteen who wore spectacles, could be heard to say in a high-pitched voice. "Two for his goatee. One for his horn lamps."

"Bags I the King Maj," excitedly proclaimed the second flapper, who was perhaps two years younger than the first.

"King Maj is barred," said the first wielder of the pencil in a severe tone. "You know that. Besides, you haven't seen him."

"When he comes I bags him," the second sportswoman maintained stoutly. "And I shall count ten."

"It's not according to the rules."

"Oh, yes, as they play at Oxford college. They always count ten for the King Maj."

Great argument ensued. It was decidedly technical; also inclined to be heated. Mame's companion, who seemed to follow it with amusement mingled with a little good-natured scorn, gently observed: "These young modern flappers are really dreadful." And then she proceeded to attract their attention.

It was not a judicious action.

"Hulloa, Vi!" cried the flappers. They rose as one, and like a pair of excited young colts came gambolling about Mame's table.

For all their rather riotous volubility they had a natural attractiveness. Also there was a strong facial like-

ness which led Mame to think these high-spirited creatures must be sisters of her friend.

The assumption was correct.

"This is sister Marjorie," said the girl, shooting a good-humoured finger at Miss Spectacles. "And this is sister Doris. The light and the joy of our home."

Both flappers ceased their prattle for a moment to look shrewdly at Mame and to bow quite nicely. Then, as their elders did not seem inclined to pay them much attention, they suddenly returned to their argument.

"Vi knows the rules of the Beaver game. Vi knows everything."

"For the love of Pete go back and eat your buns," said the elder sister. "I never heard so much noise since Poppa fell into the canal."

At this sally each young flapper laughed a loud and merry ha-ha. Then, giving their manes a shake, they humorously retired to the next table, where with unabated violence they still continued to discuss the rules of the Beaver game, which had proved so demoralising to British flapperdom.

"I expect you have young sisters of your own." This to Mame by way of apology.

Mame had no sisters of her own. But she responded to the friendliness. The more she saw of this new acquaintance the more she liked her. And the family episode in which she had just been involved showed her in such a happy light that Mame's heart warmed.

She decided to take advantage of the moment by finding out who the unknown was. Their first meeting

was still in her mind. At the Carlton she had seemed to claim so much for herself that Mame's suspicions had been aroused. But she had so amply kept the promise she had made; and now this afternoon at this big show she seemed as much top-side as ever, that, without further delay, it became imperative for the mystery to be cleared up.

Mame took inspiration from another caviar sandwich. And then she said with the amusing directness that was so characteristic:

"I just love those sisters of yours. But who are you, anyway?"

The girl produced the cigarette case Mame had already had occasion to admire and neatly detached a visiting card. Handing it across the table she denoted the name in the centre. "The Marchioness of Kidderminster." One finger brushed it lightly. "That's my mother."

"Gee!" breathed Mame softly. She was a hard-shell democrat, but she was rather impressed by what looked like a famous title.

Below the name of Mommer, in the right-hand corner of the card, was a string of lesser names, yet in their way quite as intriguing: Lady Mary Treherne, Lady Alice Treherne, Lady Violet Treherne.

The white-gloved finger came slowly to rest on the last of the three. "That's me."

Mame took the card in her hand. She gazed at it with a slightly incredulous eye.

"Say, listen, honey!" In the thrill of the moment

she quite forgot the rôle she was so determined to play: "Say, listen, honey, are *you* one of this bunch of hicks?"

Lady Violet's laugh paid honest tribute to this priceless Miss Du Rance. She was unique. But the new friend was not set up with herself or her own belongings.

"A long and stupid family." Impossible not to like the frankness. "But our mother's rather a duck."

"I'll say so."

"You'll like her when you meet her."

Mame's eyes glowed hopefully.

"But I fear it won't be to-day. She's having to sit up and purr, poor thing, among all the brass hats. Nothing below the rank of an ambassador'll be able to get near her for the next two hours."

"I'll just love some time to meet the Marchioness." Mame spoke slowly and carefully, after the manner of Mr. Falkland Vavasour. With his help she was able this time to bring the Lady C. de V. into action. "Perhaps you won't mind giving me your private address and your telephone number."

"I live in a small hutch of my own," said Lady Violet. "No. 16b Half Moon Street, bath hot and cold, company's own water Telephone double o, nine, six, Mayfair."

Mame carefully wrote the most salient of these details on the back of the visiting card.

"If you are staying on in London I hope you'll look me up."

Lady C. de V. would be de-light-ed.

"I'm always in Tuesdays four to six. Very glad to see you if you'll come round."

"You bet I will."

But the face of Mame suddenly fell. For she remembered how terribly narrow was the financial margin upon which she was at that moment poised. It sprang to the tip of her tongue to ask this new and influential friend, who no doubt was in everything and had all sorts of strings to pull, if she could help her in the matter of placing her stuff. But pride restrained her. Prudence also. This was hardly a moment in which she could venture to give herself away.

XVIII

TRIUMPH was the emotion uppermost in Miss Amethyst Du Rance when, next morning, soon after eight, she slipped into her kimono and, large sponge in hand, made her way down to the bathroom. Undoubtedly she had come off well. The present feeling of inward power was some reward for the expenditure of spirit the previous day had cost.

There was, however, a less pleasing side to the matter. And in the course of her bath it began most inconveniently to present itself. No use burking the fact: she had quite outrun the constable. Doing a swift sum in her head, she was almost horrified to find how deeply she had dipped into her purse.

Ambition was the Lorelei's song. It piped the reason out of you. One extravagance led to another. Like swimming on a summer morning in a treacherous sea, the play of sunlight on the waves lured you on. And when at last you turned for home you found it was too late.

When Mame emerged from the bathroom her feeling of elation had gone. She felt strangely like that symbolical swimmer. Not now would she be able to get back to the shore. She had dipped so deeply these last days that even if she booked steerage she would

land in New York with an empty purse. What a reckless little fool! Yet, it was life after all. From that point of view it was worth it. Certain lines of the office calendar sprang to her memory.

> One crowded hour of glorious life
> Is worth an age without a name.

That baby was right. The pity was that the glorious hour lasted so short a time. And when it came to paying the bill you had to take a pretty tight hold on yourself. Three weeks more at her present rate of living and she would be cleaned right out. The thought made her shiver. If she didn't find a way in the meantime of gathering honey she would be up against big trouble. Things looked bad. Still she could last three weeks; and though in seven months she had earned hardly a dime, if she kept a stiff lip there was still hope.

She made a fair breakfast, in spite of many and growing fears; and then went to her favourite nook in the sitting room, whose embrasure caught any early sun that was around. Writing pad on knee, she proceeded to jot down in what she had christened her "best Mamese" an account of the doings at Clanborough House.

It was not a conventional account. She told in the rather hybrid style which best suited her whimsical pen of the folks who were there, of how they bore themselves, of what they wore and so on. Even while her quaint words flowed over the paper she understood the folly of it all. Who would fall for her sort of guff?

Now that Elmer P. had failed her the sheet anchor was gone. There was perhaps one chance in a thousand that Paula Ling or Lady Violet might be able to plant it for her, but even to a nature as full of hope as a young choir boy's, the odds seemed long.

All morning she wrote steadily, covering more pages than were ever likely to be read. She was pleased with her facility of expression, although it had a tendency to get gay. But persons no brighter than herself were always pulling worse junk than that on some dub of an editor.

She would have fair copies made. One she would mail to Paula Ling and tell her for the love of Mike to place it, as unless she found a bonanza she would not be able to continue going around in London society. A second copy should accompany her on Tuesday to 16b Half Moon Street; and she would beg her new friend to do what she could with it.

Somehow the second part of the programme struck Mame as a prospect. Lady Violet, in her way, was a bit of a sorceress. She had birds of all sorts feeding from the hand. If a lone child could fix it in that good and clever head how much depended on her friendship, all was not yet lost.

By luncheon time one fact shone clear. No matter what happened in the near future to Miss Amethyst Du Rance, her return to New York must be postponed indefinitely. Tinhorns like herself—to be rather painfully frank—had quite as good a chance in London as on Broadway or in the Bronx; and if the worst should

happen, the final process of getting kicked around might seem less painful if applied by the boot of the alien. London was no cakewalk, New York wasn't either; but in the light of recent experience she fancied that of the two cities London was the less likely to skin you. Even if these comic islanders knew a dud when they saw one, anything foreign seemed to inspire them with a sense of chivalry.

New York, on the other hand, did not reach out after a sense of chivalry towards the foreigner. Or towards small-town persons either. In New York you just had to pay your way or git.

Rather than surrender to the down-and-out feeling ever gaining upon her, she went in the afternoon to the pictures, to see her favourite "Mary and Doug." Before setting out from Cowbarn into the great world she had hesitated over a profession. Vaudeville, newspapers, the movies: her choice had lain between the three. It seemed that she had chosen wrong. Instead of investing her legacy in cosmopolitan experience, which seemingly was of no particular use when it was obtained, she might have given her days and nights to dancing and singing, for which she believed herself to have something of a talent, although of course, like every talent, it needed cultivation; or still better, she might have gone to Hollywood, the Mecca of her kind, and made a first-hand study of the film.

No use, however, to consider the might have been. Her choice was made and it had turned out wrong. Every dollar of Aunt Lou's legacy was nearly blown

in. And there was precious little to show for it. But she would have to stick it now.

After the pictures, she went and did some window-gazing; and then she had a cup of tea at a Lyons café. She did not feel equal this evening to Fotheringay House. Insecurity was getting on her nerves; and those old stiffs were always trying to call her bluff in unsuspected ways. For instance, she had heard the high-pitched voice of the bishop's niece, blaa-ing over the luncheon table that the name of Miss Du Rance did not appear to be in the *Morning Post* list of those present at Clanborough House.

It was rather late when Mame returned to Montacute Square. Bleak was the sky and she herself was feeling like thirty cents. The wind had veered suddenly to the northeast, its favourite quarter in England now that April was there; and it had a power of making you wish that you had chosen some other spot in which to enjoy the glad spring weather.

Mame was hating life as she turned into the Square and was admitted to Fotheringay House by the little maid Janet.

"No letters for me, I guess?" The perfunctoriness had a touch of despair.

"Yes, miss. One on the 'all stand."

Mame passed swiftly on to the table in the hall. Sure enough, a letter. Typewritten address. Post-mark New York. From Paula Ling no doubt. She had not had a line from Paula since landing in England. Nice of a go-getter like Paula, with whom time

was money, to mail a few lines. Not ten minutes ago, Mame had feared, so black was her mood, that Paula Ling would soon be sharing the discard with Elmer P.

Unopened she crammed the letter into her coat pocket. It would keep. There was not much time to prepare for dinner; the first gong had already sounded. Upstairs, however, in her bedroom, with the electric light turned on, she could deny herself no longer. There was time for one glance at what Paula had to say. Not that it could be anything vital. Her own last and most important letter to her friend had been mailed only four days ago; therefore they must have crossed in the post.

But even the most imaginative players, as it seems, never quite know the next turn in the game of life. No sooner had Mame torn open the letter than out fell a cheque for one hundred and fifty dollars.

XIX

MAME'S life had known its "moments." This, however, was just the biggest it had known. Here was corn in Egypt. She examined the cheque, pressed it to her lips, and then reëxamined it in order to make sure that it was real.

There was a covering letter inside the envelope, nicely typed, from the office of the New York *Monitor*. So Paula had wangled herself a billet on the New York *Monitor!* One for her. It was a live paper. All sorts of whales wrote for the *Monitor*. Yes, Paula Wyse Ling was getting on.

The letter was dated Tuesday, 26th March. It began:

"Dear Mame, You must be wondering what has got me, or shall I say? what has got your script."

Mame was perplexed.

"The truth is, things have been happening. I've lately taken up the post of assistant editor on this old-established and important journal. Still I ought to have acknowledged before now the stuff you sent me. Part of my excuse is there has been delay in sending it on from Cowbarn."

Cowbarn!

"I left the *Independent* six weeks ago to take up my job here."

Mame could bear the strain no longer. She gave a hasty glance at the foot of the page. Paula Ling was not the writer of the letter. The signature was almost undecipherable, but one time and another Mame had had much practice in reading it. "Cordially, Elmer P. Dobree."

Yes, Elmer P! No other! Mame's chest began to tighten rather oddly. Fancy having doubted the loyalty of the dear boob! She ought to have known that he was one of the regular fellows. A man in a million, Elmer P.

In the nicest, modestest, most friendly way, his letter went on to say how much he liked "A Little Hick in London, England," the whimsical name she had given her weekly budget of news. Other folks liked it too. The copy already to hand was going to be printed in the *Monitor*. He hoped she wouldn't mind if it was pulled about a bit. The *Monitor* had so many calls on its space. But he was sure she would like to know that the chief editor's fancy had been really tickled by the first-hand impressions and her way of putting them across. He would like her to do the big houses and the people she saw there; Buckingham Palace, if possible, the Houses of Parliament, Hurlingham, the Opera and so on, and if the series turned out as good as Elmer personally was sure it would, he felt he could promise on the *Monitor's* behalf that its interest in her would continue.

Mame had no thought of vaudeville now. But she executed a *pas seul* in the confined space provided by

an apology for a bedroom carpet. The letter was real, hard though it was to believe it. If, however, it had not been for that cheque for one hundred and fifty priceless dollars, she would have been forced to conclude that even Elmer P. was trying to put one over on her.

XX

THE letter from New York filled Mame with new energy, fresh hope. Next day she went about the town with a changed outlook. She might not have been the same girl. A wide vista had astonishingly opened; not that she had ever doubted really that she was going to make good.

It seldom rains but it pours.

This attitude of simple faith received further justification in the course of the day. As she passed the Tube bookstall in Leicester Square a week-old copy of *High Life* chanced to catch her eye. And there, on the very front page of that rather mean-looking periodical, was an article entitled "A Little Hick in London, England."

She promptly recognised it as one of the two she had submitted to that journal. The discovery gave her a bit of a shock. Not so much as a word of acknowledgment had been received from Mr. Digby Judson, let alone any suggestion of payment, yet here was the stuff in the cold glamour of print.

Mame was wroth. She had also a feeling of modest elation; but at the moment anger was paramount.

At all times a believer in action, she promptly made her way down the street and got a bus that would take

her to Tun Court. This business should be settled without delay.

When she had climbed the dark stairs, however, which led to the editorial offices of *High Life,* something of a shock awaited her. Instead of her knock on the door marked Inquiries being answered by the fair student of Duchess Novelettes, a voice loud and gruff bade her "Come in!"

The room's sole occupant was a large, heavy man who exuded a powerful odour of beer and tobacco. Mame had no difficulty in sizing him up at once as a common roughneck.

"Can I see Mr. Digby Judson?" Mame had the asperity which springs from a sense of grievance.

"Mr. Who?" The roughneck blinked torpidly.

"The editor of this journal." Mame's asperity grew.

"Editor?" The roughneck looked like falling asleep. "Sorry to disappoint yer, missy, but I don't think yer can."

"Why not?"

"Mr. Bloomin' Editor's 'opped it."

"I don't get you."

"Skedaddled. Taken the petty cash. Overdrawn at the bank. Done a moonlight flit last night."

"Oh!" said Mame sternly as light broke upon her. "You mean he's quit."

The torpid gentleman having reinforced his lucidity by a pull at his jug of beer, remarked pensively: "Yuss. The pawty in question 'as quit."

Mame's vision of being paid on the spot in honest

cash for value honestly given began to recede. "Well, I want my money." But the futility of such a demand was clear.

"Other pawties wants it too," said the roughneck mildly. "That's why I'm setting here."

The light continued to broaden. "Then you must be a-a-what-do-you-call-em?" Mame was confronted suddenly by a limit to her knowledge of the British idiom.

"A bailiff." The roughneck buried his face in the jug.

"Can you tell me how to get the bucks he owes me?" Mame had given up all hope. But there was no harm in asking the question.

The baliff shook his large and ugly yet not ill-humoured head. "A bad egg, I fancy. The paper's broke. Between you and me, missy"—the beery voice grew confidential—"I've been put in by the debenture holders. As you might say I represent a little matter of four thousand quid."

"Sakes! Then I guess I'll not be able to connect."

"Clever if you do, missy, take it from me."

Mame slowly adjusted her thinking cap. She regarded herself as the possessor of a natural business head. And in the matter of her rights she did not believe in quitting too early.

She addressed the baliff sternly. "Who you acting for?"

"The debenture holders."

"I don't get you. Who are they anyways?"

The man produced a wad of greasy-looking papers from the interior of his coat. He moistened his thumb, selected a dirty card and handed it to Mame. "Them's the solicitors."

"Messrs. Ackerman, Barton and Profitt," the card informed Mame.

"That's the firm. Their office is just acrost the road in Chawncery Lane."

Mame thanked the roughneck for his information and then obtained permission to keep the card. The address might come in useful. All the same there was nothing at the moment to lead one to suppose that it would.

From what the bailiff said, she would be wise to write off the money due her from *High Life* as a bad debt.

XXI

TUESDAY afternoon saw Miss Amethyst Du Rance armed *cap-à-pie* for a second descent upon London society.

Since the opportune arrival of Elmer P.'s letter the invitation to Half Moon Street had been much in her thoughts. It opened up new possibilities. And the friend she had so providentially found was likely to prove of great value in the life she aspired to lead.

Having received her baptism of fire at Clanborough House, Mame had none of the qualms which, on that occasion, had assailed her. Within her now was a happy feeling of success. Moreover, a black cloud had been lifted from her mind. Elmer P.'s letter had changed everything.

By nature adventurous, she was stimulated by the prospect of big things. To begin with, she bestowed great pains upon her appearance. She had lately discovered that she paid for dressing; and it gave her real pleasure to linger over the last touches to her small but attractive self.

She had, too, an instinct for doing things well. The afternoon was fine, there was spring in the air, but she could afford a taxi to Half Moon Street. Therefore

she taxi'd. It gave her a sense of being in the picture to drive up in state to Lady Violet's flat.

It was about a quarter to four when she found herself going up in the lift—a handier word than elevator—to 16b on the second floor. She pressed a neat button and a dinky maid, who was much too smart for a hired girl, in snowy cap and apron and with a prim English look, ushered the visitor across a tiny entrance hall into a singularly cosy and artistically furnished drawing room. To Mame it was quite the last word in feminine elegance.

It was a little early for callers and she had the good luck to find Lady Violet alone. As soon as the visitor was announced the hostess laid aside the novel she was reading, got up cheerily and welcomed her with that forthcomingness which from the first had taken Mame.

There was great charm in this girl and Mame reacted to it. Here were a big outlook and first-hand knowledge of the great world. To Lady Violet life was a game; human nature an amusing spectacle, a kind of comedy farce; men and women, no matter how highly placed, were merely players. But she had not a spark of ill nature; at least Mame as yet had not detected one. Nor, as far as Mame could tell, was she grinding her own axe. The top-notchers Mame had been privileged to look on in New York from a respectful distance were not folks of this kidney. They were mighty careful to keep you at arm's length, unless you could make them feel that you had something substantial to give

them in return for any interest they condescended to take in a person as raw as yourself.

This afternoon, however, Mame was not feeling quite so raw as she had done. Clanborough House combined with the letter from New York had somehow given her a more substantial basis. It is wonderful what a feeling of success can do. Besides, Lady Violet, as usual, was just as easy as pie.

She told the visitor how pleased she was to see her and fixed her snugly in a chair.

"When are you thinking of going home?"

"I expect I'll stay on through the summer now." Mame had a slight air of importance. "I like the life here and I've just had a commission to report it for the New York *Monitor*."

"That'll be interesting."

Mame hoped it would be. If she was careful how she played her cards it might be very interesting indeed, but the problem of the moment was the exact order in which to do so.

She was a creature of quick intuitions. And she promptly decided that the perfect frankness which up till now had served her so well was decidedly the card to bank on.

To go around, to see things from the inside, to get into the swim was Mame's ambition and she naïvely confessed it to Lady Violet. This new friend did not discourage it. She did, indeed, seem a little amused, but not in the way of patronage or ill nature. Perhaps it was because this quaint thing from a land where

Lady Violet herself had enjoyed jolly times was so liberally endowed with the quality that most appealed to her in man or woman, horse or hound. It was the quality best summed up by the good word "pluck," which from their first chance meeting had inspired her with an honest desire to help this little American.

Something about Miss Amethyst De Rance had certainly touched Lady Violet. This girl was as different from the run of Americans with whom she occasionally rubbed shoulders on their native continent as chalk is different from cheese. And among her compatriots whom Lady Violet knew in London, not one in the least resembled her.

Obviously her general education was limited, but this girl was as live as a fire. She was very original; and her decidedly pretty head was full of ideas. Even if in the main they were directed to her own advancement, why blame her? But it was her way of saying things that appealed most strongly to this amateur of the human comedy. Lady Violet was a connoisseur, who in her spare time collected odd types of her fellow creatures, as other people collect postage stamps, foreign coins, pewter or old Sheffield. Moreover, having a keen, if rather freakish sense of fun, it pleased her sometimes to play one "type" off against another.

All the same, there was no young woman in London society more genuinely popular. If she could be, and frequently was, mischievous in a subtle way, she had a knack of helping lame dogs over stiles. Providing she liked a person, and she sometimes liked them for the

oddest reasons, such as the shape of their ears, or because their toes turned in, she would take quite a lot of trouble over them.

This afternoon the funny little American she had met at the Carlton ten days ago, and who now graced her "collection" as if she had been a scarce butterfly with rare and attractive markings, was sending up a rather pathetic social S. O. S. Miss Du Rance, who was really pretty if she wouldn't "make up" and wear the wrong sort of clothes, had already let her in on the ground floor in the matter of confidences. The girl had, it seemed, ambitions, which she had precious little chance of being able to gratify.

Lady Violet, however, did not tell her so. She was much too good-hearted for that. From the first she had been attracted by the child. Something looked out of those good grey eyes. Already this new friend's worldly wise brain was at work.

Mame was encouraged to prattle artlessly on. There was no display of vulgar curiosity; but in the most natural way Lady Violet probed the secrets of her past. The life on the farm, four miles from Cowbarn, Iowa; the burning of the midnight candle to fit herself for the larger life; the good Miss Jenkins; the secret study of stenography; the escape to the *Independent* office; the arrival of Aunt Lou's legacy; the flight to New York; the police raid; the trip to Europe—warmed by sympathy, Mame told the story of her life. And as told in the vivid native idiom, which, to the dweller in

another world, had all the charm of novelty, the story almost became an epic.

Yes, she was worth helping, this rather pathetic child. Lady Violet fixed on her again that masked look which had a strange power of seeing through the most complex people. But this little go-getter—her own priceless word—was not complex at all. She was perfectly easy to read. And yet so interesting. In fact she was something new.

Miss Du Rance had just told the story of her life, when a tall, slightly faded-looking woman of forty came into the room.

The first thing Mame noted about this lady was the way in which her hair was done. She must have a peach of a maid. It was turning a most becoming shade of grey; it was abundant and it had an air of great elegance. That indeed was the quality which dominated the lady herself; an air of great elegance. She was subdued in dress and in manner; she moved like some extremely dignified and well-nurtured cat; yet there was nothing about her of that passive hostility which caused Mame so actively to dislike the Tabbies of Fotheringay House.

Lady Violet addressed this rather formal yet most agreeable dame as Cousin Edith. "Let me introduce Miss Du Rance of Chicago," she said to Cousin Edith with a pensive smile.

Mame returned vigorously Cousin Edith's bow and then offered an equally vigorous hand. "Very pleased to meet you, ma'am," said Mame cordially. Her demo-

cratic spirit was a little doubtful of the "ma'am" but she was using company manners, so it seemed all right.

"Of Chicago," however, troubled her. "Cowbarn, Iowa." She hastened with a frank smile to correct Lady Violet.

"Near Chicago," said the hostess *sotto voce* to Cousin Edith. For some reason, which was not at all clear, she seemed determined to locate Mame in a region wherein Mame had no desire to be located. Iowa was good enough for her, but evidently in London society Illinois was considered more Chick.

She took quite a liking to Cousin Edith. That lady had a nice flow of talk that was very amiable and kindly. Unlike Lady Violet's it was not syncopated nor was it full of slang; it had no witty twists and turns, but it was well worth listening to. Cousin Edith appeared to have seen and known quite a lot, but she lacked Lady Violet's force and humour and her modern touch. All the same she was light in hand and had the happy knack of meeting people a little more than half way, which could not be said for most Britishers.

Mame was getting on famously with Cousin Edith when a Mrs. Creber Newsum was announced. Mrs. Creber Newsum was tall, blonde, very blue-eyed, very fragile. Distinction seemed to stand off from her manner in festoons. Like her fair hair and her fine chin her fluting voice seemed to be raised a shade too high.

The moment Mrs. Creber Newsum entered the room, and even before being introduced to her, which she almost immediately was, Mame instinctively knew this

was a kind of dame of whom she would do well to be careful. She had a subtle feeling before a word had passed between them that the newcomer was one of her own countrywomen. And in that case she shrewdly suspected that as far as Mrs. Creber Newsum was concerned she had better go slow. By now Miss Amethyst Du Rance knew enough of Europe to be aware that in the eyes of a Mrs. Creber Newsum, with her Fifth Avenue, Long Island, flat-in-Paris, villa-in-Italy style, she was very much, at present, "the wrong kind of American."

However, she was not always going to be the wrong kind of American. But for the moment, knowing as much as she did, and being able to guess at what she didn't, she intended to imitate the motions of a character famous in the Bible. She would walk delicately.

Miss Du Rance was not flustered at all. She had been through the fire at Clanborough House, she had learned a few things and she had the moral support of an influential and an able friend. Just how able that friend was she discovered within the next two minutes.

"Mrs. Creber Newsum," said Lady Violet, in a voice that sounded quite impressive, "this is my friend Miss Du Rance of Chicago."

It was odd, but Mame perceived in a flash the tactical value of the "Chicago." Somehow it seemed to account for her in a general way, whereas the Iowa, let alone the Cowbarn, might have accounted for her much too definitely, at any rate in the eyes of Mrs.

Creber Newsum. Beyond a doubt, Lady Violet was clever.

Mrs. Creber Newsum glanced at Mame, more in sorrow than in anger. Then she offered her hand as if it rather hurt her to do so; and then she withdrew it as if the touch of Mame's fingers was a shade more than her spotless gloves could bear. Mame felt that her compatriot—she couldn't tell exactly how she knew Mrs. Creber Newsum was an American, but she would have bet a hundred and fifty dollars that she was—was slightly overdoing the aristocracy racket. On Fifth Avenue it might have seemed all right; but it was so consciously "high-grade," that it had a tendency to get on the nerves of common folks.

The introduction had just been got over with real queenliness on the one side—Mrs. Creber Newsum simply couldn't help being queenly—and real discretion on the other, when Mame surprised the broadest smile she had yet seen on the averted face of Lady Violet. Plainly her friend was enjoying the moment hugely. What there was to be secretly so amused about, Mame couldn't guess. But the smile of Lady Violet set her thinking.

Mrs. Creber Newsum sat slowly on an ottoman, about as far from her small compatriot as she could conveniently get. And then she said in a rather high but agreeable voice, although much troubled with culture, "Have you been in England long, Miss Du Rance?"

"Five weeks and four days," said Mame.

"Five weeks and four days," Mrs. Creber Newsum repeated softly. "An interesting experience for you, is it not?"

Mame was not to be drawn. The conversation as far as it touched Mrs. Creber Newsum and herself seemed to languish. But neither Cousin Edith nor Lady Violet was the kind of person who would permit it to languish generally. They had it well in hand. It could be wound up and set going just as soon as they chose, but Lady Violet, at least, wanted to see what the two Americans would make of each other.

As a matter of fact she knew. And there was no need to wait for her prescience to be demonstrated. But for some reason, these differing types greatly amused her. Perhaps she rather wanted to see what the homely little barnyard chick would make of the superlative cosmopolitan peacock. She knew exactly what the peacock had made already of the little chick.

Mame's quick brain was busy even if her tongue was inert. She would get no good of Mrs. Creber Newsum and she must be particularly careful that the high-flyer did not call her bluff. As she sat listening to the light and clever talk of these new friends she determined from now on to watch her step with unceasing vigilance. The chances that were coming her way must be stepping stones to her great ambition; but she must expect no help and no mercy from the Mrs. Creber Newsums of the earth.

Cousin Edith soon began to address mild and non-committal nothings to Miss Du Rance, to ease, as it

were, Chicago's burden in the presence of Cosmopolis. Mame felt humbly grateful. Cousin Edith was a kind of natural dear. And Mame was sure she had as much culture as Mrs. Creber Newsum, but that she preferred to conceal it rather than to cut a dash. But what really interested Miss Du Rance was not the talk of Cousin Edith. She was responsive and polite, but one ear was kept open for the cavortings of Mrs. Creber Newsum and Lady Violet.

It was wonderful, the assurance and the calm with which Lady Violet lit on highbrow subjects. Duse, Cæsar Franck, Tchehov, Marcel Proust, all that kind of dope; she could take Mrs. Creber Newsum over the course without putting a foot wrong. She had no airs about it either. But she could ladle out high-brow eye-wash till the cows came home, merely as a matter of course. Mrs. Creber Newsum, however, seemed to inflate. Mame resolved to study this kind of cross talk. A useful trick to learn.

Pretty soon other folks began to pile in and, from Mame's viewpoint, things grew still more entertaining. Lady So and So; Mrs. This; Miss That. She did not always catch their names, or at least her memory, usually so good, was not always able to retain them. Some she was introduced to; some she was not; but no matter whom she found herself up against, she was careful to maintain a Biblical style of progress.

Most of these dashers thought her dull, no doubt. Let them. She must play for safety. Some of them eyed her curiously; they couldn't quite conceal a

"Hulloa-what-are-you-doing-here?" sort of look. But the fairly large room began to fill. And the fuller it became the more at ease grew Mame. There was a better chance to take cover.

This crowd was worth observing at close range. Mame did not let the opportunity slip. The proper study of mankind is man. According to the office calendar some wise guy had pulled that in the reign of Queen Anne. Mame had already developed considerable powers in that direction. She was getting quite expert at sizing folks up.

Socially speaking, she now divided her fellow creatures into two classes. Class A, on the level. Class B, four-flushers. Nothing had surprised her more in New York than the prevalence of Class B. They were everywhere. And, as far as she was concerned, they were highly dangerous people. One of their chief delights was to call the bluff of their competitors.

London also suffered from Class B. It was less dominant, however, than on the other side of the Atlantic. And for the most part, in London they were four-flushers with a difference. They saw bigger, they carried more sail; perhaps they were older hands at the game.

Even Lady Violet's smart drawing room was not wholly free of Class B. As the place got fuller and fuller and the tea and cake began to circulate, the other sex made a bit of a show. Mame welcomed them as a pleasing diversion. She gave far less thought to men

as a rule than she gave to women. Somehow she felt that she had so much less to fear from them.

London, she had heard, was rather famous for its men. They were said to wear their clothes better than any in the world. That might be so. But among those who blew in upon 16b Half Moon Street this afternoon were one or two whose clothes ought not to have been worn by anybody. Artistic johns, no doubt. One in particular, large, shambling, big-kneed, loud-voiced, had a regular Fifth of November appearance.

Mame was so struck by him that she asked her right-hand neighbour, a very knowledgeable girl who unmistakably belonged to Class A and who was full of natural elegance, who he was.

"Shelton France Mackelland, the Canadian poet," the girl informed her.

"A Canuck, is he?" She wondered how he dared.

"Don't you know his famous volume of poems, *The Old Shack?*"

Mame confessed that she did not.

"I adore them myself." The girl, who was very pretty and quite simple, spoke with an unpremeditated innocence that Mame liked but deplored. Class A girls of this sort made it altogether too easy for Class B people to get away with it.

"No use for Canucks." Mame looked towards Shelton France Mackelland with open hostility. "They are the worst kind of tinhorns mostly."

Sweetly and gravely the girl begged Mame's pardon.

This odd, fierce, untamed little American was using what to her was a foreign language.

Before Mame could fully expound what her attitude was towards the Canucks of the earth, a young man of a different sort bore down upon her with a plate of cakes. He was the identical Bill whom Mame had admired so much when she had first seen him two weeks ago. This afternoon he was looking nicer than ever. A picture of health and comeliness, he was doing enormous credit to his tailor. And his manners were most engagingly frank. Even in the eyes of an observer severely democratic they hadn't a suspicion of "lugs."

"I like that one," said Mame, after the bearer of the cakes had passed on. She bit a piece out of her recently acquired bun and found brandy in the heart of it. "If I was falling in love I'll say he'd be the baby for me."

The friendly neighbour glanced at her in mild but furtive wonder.

"I didn't get his name?" said Mame interrogatively.

"That's my cousin Kidderminster."

"Kidderminster, is it?" In what connection had she heard the name? She suddenly remembered. "I guess he's some relation of Lady Violet's."

"Her brother."

For a reason Mame could not have explained her heart gave a little jump. "That's bully," she murmured. And then she went on, less perhaps from a

desire for information than to divert attention from her own enthusiasm. "Then you, I s'pose, are Lady Violet's cousin?"

"One of many," said the girl. "Violet has any amount of cousins. Simply heaps and heaps of relations."

"Plenty of influence?" The true meaning of that mystic word was now being revealed to Mame.

"Yes, in a way, one would say she had. But she's got any amount of brains, as well, you know."

Mame was quite sure that Lady Violet had.

"Everybody thinks her so clever."

"Earns a big income, I guess."

"I believe so. And perfectly wonderful how she gets about. Goes everywhere. Knows everybody."

"Pulls the big stuff."

"I beg your pardon." A simple sort of tulip, this girl.

"Kinda got all the strings in her hand," said Mame, trying to be lucid.

"Most of them, I think. Anyway she has a tremendously good time."

The folks began to get a bit thinner, to diminish by twos and threes. Mame, having had a most entertaining afternoon, decided not to outstay her welcome. She rose and crossed to Lady Violet, who was talking very quick French to a foreign-looking bozo, with an imperial and a braided jacket, who stood peering over his teacup into her eyes.

"Can I come and see you again?" Mame offered a white glove, in which she took considerable pride, at the precise angle she had discovered to be fashionable.

"Oh, please, please!" Lady Violet spoke as if she really meant it. "And quite soon, you know."

The cheery warmth of the words left Mame with a feeling that she was taking leave of a real friend.

XXII

WHEN Mame had stepped into the lift outside the door of 16b, by pure coincidence she found it occupied already by the tall, immaculate top-hatted form of Bill. It was a piece of luck. She had taken quite a fancy to this young man and was ready to seize a chance of improving the acquaintance.

"I hope you enjoyed yourself," he said, with hearty and cheerful politeness.

Miss Du Rance left him no sort of doubt upon that point. "Lady Violet's your sister, ain't she?"

Bill said she was. Further he remarked in genial brotherly fashion: "A good sort, old Vi! And clever as blazes, you know. Got clean away with all the brains of our family."

Mame offered no comment, but she felt somehow that it was highly probable. Bill, with all his charm and manliness, made no pretence at intellect. But in the opinion of Miss Du Rance he had better things to show.

When they reached the ground floor and found themselves in the vestibule, Bill said, "Can I get you a taxi or anything?"

"Are you taxi-ing yourself?" inquired the judicious Mame.

"No, I'm hitting the pike." Bill was proud of his American.

"Same here. Which way you going?"

"Along Piccadilly as far as St. James's Street."

Mame was going along Piccadilly as far as the Circus. They might walk together if he didn't mind.

Bill said he was enchanted. Perhaps he was. There was nothing in his manner to suggest the contrary. An amusing little puss. She seemed different from all the other girls he knew. He must ask Vi what part of the States she came from. Perhaps he might have asked the amusing little puss herself had he not been kept so busy answering the questions she put to him.

The number of questions Bill had to answer in their pleasant saunter up the street, and across the road, and by the Green Park railings was astonishing. But he didn't mind at all. In fact he rather liked it. She was as fresh as paint. And simply rippling with intelligence. No end of punch in her, too. Yes, she was altogether different from the other girls he knew. As for her comically expressive phrases, she sort of fired them off, a hundred to the minute, like some jolly old Maxim gun.

At the top of Saint James's Street, they came to a stop and Bill remarked: "I get off here."

Miss Du Rance looked a trifle disappointed.

"Goin' into my pothouse to play a game at snooker. Into that funny old box, yonder, with the bow window." Bill's hand indicated Ward's Club just opposite.

Somehow, yet without saying so, little Miss Du Rance, the quaint and charming American, was able to convey that to her mind for such an upstanding young fellow to spend a fair spring evening in that way was a pity.

"Daresay she's right," mused Bill. A bit of a thought reader, Bill.

"*I'm* going as far as the Circus," said the droll minx.

It really was such a fine evening that Bill suddenly decided that he might walk as far as the Circus for the good of his health.

When the young man had been steered in safety past the dangerous corner, the ply of questions began again.

Did he like living in London? What was his favourite flower? Did he care for jazz music? Who was his favourite author? Wasn't it just a bore to be a blood-peer? Did he like fishing better than gunning? Or did he like gunning better than fishing? He played polo of course? How did he like the Prince of Wales? What did he think of soldiering? By the way, what was the name of his regiment? She had heard, but had forgotten.

"The Pinks."

"Why were they called the Pinks?"

"A sort of rival show to the Blues."

"But why the Blues?"

Bill shook his head and laughed. "Why anything?"

"Yes—why anything?"

"Had he got a decoration?"

As a matter of fact he had several. And a little shamefacedly he admitted it.

Then why didn't he wear them?

People didn't wear their decorations except on full-dress occasions.

"If I had a V. C.," said Miss Du Rance, "I should just wear it any old time. And King George himself wouldn't stop me."

Without going so far as to offer contradiction, Bill seemed a little inclined to doubt it.

Howbeit that was neither here nor there. And their walk was most enjoyable. Bill was kept in a ripple of amusement. This little Miss Du Rance was the livest thing out. As for her ply of questions it was so unexpected that it never became tiresome. Perhaps it was because she was so nailingly pretty. Those serious grey eyes were as good as anything he had seen in a month of Sundays.

When they got to the Tube in Piccadilly Circus said Miss Du Rance, in whose voice was regret: "I must leave you now. You can go back to your snooker. But I am just awfully pleased and proud to have met you." She held forth a neat white glove. "I do hope we shall meet again."

Bill said, as he grasped the white glove fervently: "We must—if you *do* think so."

"I don't say what I don't think." The sternness of Miss Du Rance was perfectly killing.

Bill, who was still enjoying every moment of her, ventured to hope that she didn't. And as an earnest

of that he went on to ask, tentatively, whether she cared for dancing.

"I'll say yes."

"That's splendid! We must get Vi to arrange a party one afternoon for the Orient Dance Club."

"When?"

Bill was hardly prepared to be picked up in that way. Such businesslike promptitude was a threat to his gravity. "One day next week if it can be managed and it'll be convenient to you."

Next week, any old day, would be quite convenient to Miss Du Rance. At that they left it.

XXIII

WAYS and means were still a problem for Mame. The one hundred and fifty dollars, which had dropped like manna from the sky, were not going to carry her far. One cannot live on the air of London, England, solid though it may be compared with the champagne of New York. Even in that exhilarating climate one needs plenty of "dough" to carry on from day to day.

Miss Du Rance was by way of having quite a lot of success. Socially she had gone much further than she could have dared to hope in so short a time. Her foot was now planted well on the ladder, but she must take care lest she climb to an altitude a little too dizzy. It is so easy to lose one's head.

Shrewd to the bone, a true daughter of the Middle West, she felt she had better call a halt and look around. It had been a rare bit of luck to strike these friends, but the margin of her resources was so narrow that unless she could add to it pretty soon, and also find other means of income, she would not be able to stay the course.

The situation was again growing serious. Those few providential dollars were already melting like snow. True, she now felt entitled to count on another

draft from Elmer P. at an early date, but precisely when it would come she didn't know. Besides even when it arrived it was not going to last very long. No, it would be wrong to shirk the fact that the margin upon which she was working was uncomfortably small.

This fact came directly home to her, when, about three days after her walk with Bill along Piccadilly, she received a hurried line from Lady Violet, suggesting that on that day week they should make up a party for tea and dancing at the Orient Club, Knightsbridge. If Miss Du Rance cared for that sort of thing she might find it rather amusing.

As it happened few girls cared more for it than Mame. Even in her primitive Cowbarn epoch, an occasional dance with the best and brightest of the boys had been her favourite, indeed her only, means of recreation. Moreover, in New York a certain amount of time had been given to the cultivation of the art. She had always felt it to be within the range of her lightly tripping toes to tread a measure in the best company. Dancing harmonised with her vitality and her love of movement. Had she not seriously considered having herself trained for vaudeville?

Keen as she was to fall in with Lady Violet's suggestion, she was also wise enough to scent the peril. One way or another it would mean further expenditure that she really could not afford. The position was rather maddening. Her future, as she saw it, as she had planned it, as she had fully determined that it should be, lay with these influential and attractive folks.

Perhaps she was a little snob, but this sort of life quite spoiled one for any other.

Still, money was needed to live it. Money was needed all the time. Unless one knew how to get it regularly and in good sums one would surely be wise to turn aside from the lures of English society.

Instinctively Mame felt that she ought not to accept Lady Violet's invitation. She would be getting into deeper water than she cared about. Delightful as the sun and the ripples were upon the waves, she was nothing like a strong enough swimmer at present to trust herself to that treacherous sea. Yet, alas, there was a second instinct, equally powerful, which recalled a favourite text in the office calendar: There is a Tide.

That fly-marked old calendar had a wonderful knack of turning out to be true. There was a Tide, not a doubt of it. And Mame Durrance was poised upon the top, but so precariously that if she didn't watch out she would find herself in difficulties; for at present she had not learned to swim beyond a very few strokes. But she was there all right, on the crest of the wave. And somehow she felt the power rising within her to breast those waters. She would sure be the worst fool alive if now she went back on her chances.

XXIV

A WEEK passed. Miss Du Rance taxi'd again to Half Moon Street; this time with a brand new pair of dancing slippers gracing her small but lively feet. The paucity of her remaining dollars was beginning to alarm her now. No further word had come from New York. But whatever happened she was going to follow her luck.

She found Lady Violet seated before a typewriter, clucking away as if for dear life. This was a form of effort with which Mame was only too familiar.

"So sorry." Lady Violet glanced up from her task. "Please excuse me five minutes. I'm all behind as usual. This weekly syndicate letter is such a bore. One tangled mass of detail." She made a wry mouth. "Always leave it to the last moment. How can one find anything new to say about the high class underwear at Peary's and Hodnett's Annual Spring Sale? Help yourself to a gasper. The box on the table. And that's the new novel of Loti, by the side of it; the one with the paper cover. My review for the *Courier* has to be in to-morrow. Luckily one doesn't have to say anything new about Loti, does one?"

Mame did not smoke and she did not read French. But when in Rome, had said Paula Ling; or was it the

office calendar that had said it for her? She left the silver box alone but took up the latest work of Pierre Loti with the air of a connoisseur.

The book, however, did not claim much of her attention. She sat watching Lady Violet work. In the sight of an expert she was by no means skilful; it was rather pathetic to see her dabbing with one uncertain finger of each hand. She also lent an ear to Lady Violet's stream of whimsical complaint and humorous apology. Plainly this journalistic egg was bored by her luck. That old syndicate of hers was surely worth good and regular money. If only—! But why indulge vain thoughts?

In ten minutes, or less, Lady Violet was through. She shovelled her copy, some twenty badly typed pages, into a large envelope; sealed and addressed it; then with a comic sigh of relief she picked up the meerschaum holder and had recourse to the silver box. "So sorry," she apologized for the *n*th time. "But we are not expected at the Orient until five."

She rang for Davis, that treasure among parlour maids, of whose old-family-retainer air Mame was a shade in awe, and set down as "sniffy." To Davis the envelope was handed; she was told to send it at once to Fleet Street by district messenger. And she was asked to get a taxi.

In a time surprisingly short, as it seemed to Mame, the maid had returned to say that the taxi awaited them. Lady Violet crammed on an expensive hat without seeming to care, but Mame realised that she

had a marvellous knack of looking right in all circumstances. Paula Ling would not have treated a hat that way, not on her life. As for Mame herself, she had already taken a full twenty minutes to fix her own before starting from Fotheringay House. But this skirt flopped it on and there you were. Mame would have liked Paula to have seen her.

If Mame could have banished the feeling of being on such terribly thin ice, she would have enjoyed herself immensely at the Orient Dance Club. The floor was good; the band, although by no means equal to what New York could do—in Mame's opinion it was hardly at the Cowbarn level in its interpretation of jazz music—was still well enough for London, England. All the folks were real select, even if their dancing was nothing to write home about. As for the soft drinks and the eats, they were quite O. K. But these matters, grave in their way, were of minor importance.

The really vital things, when all was said, were the lounge lizards with whom Mame was privileged to take the floor. First of all there was Bill. He was not as light in hand as Elmer P., to mention only one of Cowbarn's kernoozers. Even if he didn't move just naturally to jazz music he was a good trier. Mame was wise enough not to expect too much of the bo in the matter of hitting the parquet. But even if he was no star, and his stiff British joints would have been none the worse for a little oil, he was well enough, he would serve.

Anyhow the young man appeared to enjoy himself.

He was all smiles and willingness and good humour. Mame felt quite proud of him as she guided his somewhat errant steps amid the Chick if slightly immobile throng. She also felt rather proud of herself. It was not a real top-notch dancing as she understood the art, but she had a kind of hunch that she was sort of cutting a shine.

Bill was only one among the lads of the village. There were others; to the taste of Miss Du Rance perhaps not so choice as he; still she was nowise ashamed to be seen with them in the centre of the floor. For the most part they were Bill's brother officers and school pals and so on. And all were regular fellows even if they did not quite know how to move to ragtime.

What struck Mame as the chief difference between this mild festivity and a hop in her native land was the quietness of it all. The folks were so much more solemn, so much more serious. There was no whirling you off your feet, no shouting; compared with Cowbarn, Iowa, or even New York, it was rather like a high-class funeral. Mame had a powerful desire to let herself out a bit. However, she soon concluded that it would not be wise to do so. When in Rome! . . . particularly when Rome has not even heard of the Monkey Clutch!

Still, these handsome, strapping, brown-faced, blue-eyed mothers' boys were very friendly and very pleasant. Mame noticed that Lady Violet took to them quite kindly. She was the best dancer there, Mame

considered, barring of course present company, and a couple of professionals, who had New York written all over them, although said to be French. But Lady Violet was a very good mover indeed, in an amateurish way. She had evidently benefited by her American experience; she got these lads around in proper style; and she seemed a great favourite with them all. A real sport Mame considered her.

The same applied to Bill; also to his friends and brothers in arms. And they had excellent taste in ices and cakes and in nice soft drinks; although the best drink of all, that was called Cup, was not so soft either. For a rather backward village like London things really went pretty well. If Miss Du Rance could have forgotten for a single moment that she was dancing on a full-sized volcano she would have thoroughly enjoyed herself.

Apart from the uncomfortable feeling that she ought not to be there at all, Mame was conscious of only one other blot on the proceedings. Not so much a blot as a cloud. And yet cloud was hardly the word. Everybody was so charming to everybody, so kind and so polite and yet so quietly merry, that it was a hunch rather than a rock-bottom fact which ever so slightly took the edge off Mame's enjoyment.

The hunch assumed the form of a Miss Childwick. She was a hefty girl of twenty-three, buxom, upstanding, and a looker as Mame was bound to own. Lady Violet sought an early opportunity of telling her little friend that this was a regular Crœsus of a girl, the sole

heiress of Childwick's Three Ply Flannelette, whose singular merits were the theme of every hoarding from Land's End to Hong Kong.

Miss Childwick's money would not have mattered so much, but where the snag came, as it seemed to Miss Du Rance, was that its statuesque owner, as Lady Violet also took an early opportunity of making known to her, was very keen on Bill. In other words, although Lady Violet did not put it quite so crudely, it was up to the little lady from Cowbarn, Iowa, to keep off the grass.

Speaking strictly by the card, there was of course no particular reason why Miss Du Rance should keep off the grass. Bill was fair game for any little angler who really understood the use of a bug and pole. But Lady Violet gave a sort of hint that it would hardly be cricket for Miss Du Rance to butt in and spoil things. Miss Childwick was so rich that everybody in London and Shropshire hoped very much that she and Bill were going to make a match of it.

That's all very well, thought Mame. Evidently she considers it will be unsporting of me to dance more than twice with the dandiest bird on the bough. At all events, if these were not exactly Lady Violet's own views, it was a fair presumption they were the views of Miss Childwick. In fact the Celebrated Three Ply Flannelette had already given the Funny Little American a once-over at pretty close range. Her fine eyes seemed to glow out at the good grey ones of Miss Du Rance from every quarter of the room. And each time

they did so they seemed to glow with the light of battle.

Mame did not blame Miss Childwick altogether. Human nature is just as liable to be human nature at the Orient Dance Club, Knightsbridge, London, England, as at the Temple of Terpsichore, Cowbarn, Iowa, or any other dive you care to name.

No, Miss Du Rance did not really blame Miss Childwick for sending a sort of general warning along the wires. But where she did blame Miss Childwick was for trying to put one over on her. When she came to think about it afterwards she was not exactly sure that the Three Ply Flannelette had really meant to do that, but it certainly looked uncommonly like it. When you are mozing around with the real nutty bits of nougat in Knightsbridge, London, England, it is easier, no doubt, to be mistaken than in a small burg in a Middle Western state.

What really happened was, that after Miss Du Rance had put Bill through his paces the second time in three, and they had encored a vanilla ice and cracker, and were just going to take the floor the third time in four, up barges the Three Ply Flannelette, all smiles and politeness, yet with an undercurrent of just owning the earth, though perhaps not really meaning it. And Bill, for all his dyed-in-the-wool niceness, at heart a simpleton, chose that identical moment to make his old friend Miss Childwick known to his new friend, Miss Du Rance of Chicago.

If ever youth, since the world began, simply insisted

on finding trouble, it was the tactless Bill. Miss Childwick's eyes snapped and Miss Du Rance did not blame her. The eyes of Miss Du Rance snapped back and it is to be hoped that Miss Childwick attached no blame to her either. It was a mere temperamental action on the part of Miss Du Rance. Honours were easy over that course. But immediately there followed the passage, which, brief as it was, caused Mame seriously to ask herself whether this girl was not trying to put one over on her.

Perhaps, after all, it did not amount to that. When, in cool blood, in the seclusion of her chamber, Miss Du Rance pondered Miss Childwick, quietly and sincerely, extenuating nought, yet attributing nothing to her in malice, she reached the conclusion that she had no real ground of complaint against the Three Ply Flannelette, beyond the fact that it looked a little too superior. Perhaps it didn't mean to really. But she was one of those trained-to-the-minute girls whom Mame had glimpsed from time to time taking the air on Riverside Drive, previous, as Paula Ling declared, to their sailing for Europe in search of a stray Italian prince or British earl.

Miss Childwick had just that air. You could not call it "lugs." It was something deeper, more full of meaning and less irritating than the quality the Britishers speak of as "side." She had an I-mean-to-be-a-marchioness-if-it-kills-me look about her, which did not accord with the democratic notions of Miss Du Rance. No, they could never be real friends. And that

was why, having been warned to keep off the grass, little Miss Du Rance was not quite clear in her own little mind whether she was going to obey the signal.

After all, a cat may look at a king even if it is not allowed to look at a canary. What sport it would be to get into the cage when Miss Three Ply was not about. Before now such things had happened. In fact they were always happening. It would not be the first occasion by many that a small outsider had made her way into a private aviary.

Still, at the moment such thoughts were far removed from the region of the practical. Yet Bill was a marquis, so his sister said. Therefore he was simply asking for trouble, from even the humblest of Columbia's daughters. If Miss Three Ply, who had kind of appointed herself to look after the sweet rube, did not watch out, some other young skirt might easily get away with his coronet.

However, these were vain thoughts. At the present time Miss Du Rance had about fifty dollars between herself and bankruptcy. So really and truly the ice was thin. But she was determined to yield to the passing hour, even if she could never quite forget her nearness to unplumbed fathoms of icy water.

If she could have laid that knowledge by, these two crowded hours at the Orient Dance Club would have been the jolliest ever. This was a real taste of life. All was harmony, gaiety, good-humoured fun. But the clock struck seven, the band stopped playing, the danc-

ers began to collect their taxis. Then it was that a kind of Cinderella feeling came upon Mame.

The ball was over. The dream was at an end. She would have to go back to Montacute Square, to inferior food and inferior people, to drudgery and grubbing, to the forming of plans for a mighty precarious to-morrow. As she stood on the Club steps by the side of Lady Violet, who was giving her friends a cheerful good-bye, Mame's heart sank. She had been lifted up only to be cast down. Life was pretty tough for girls of her sort, with nothing between them and the weather. She watched Bill hand Miss Childwick into the smartest limousine imaginable, with chauffeur and footman complete in dark liveries faced with buff; and a Robert-E.-Lee-at-Gettysburg feeling came upon her.

"Which way are you goin'?"

Lady Violet's clear gay voice suddenly impinged upon the bitterness of Mame's reverie.

Mame hardly knew which way she was going. And at that moment she didn't care. The bottom seemed out of things. "Any old way, I guess, is good enough for me," she said despondently.

Lady Violet laughed. Mame had a great power of making this high-flyer laugh, but why she should have she didn't know. But the laugh was friendly and kind; it implied no more than an unlimited capacity for seeing the most human side of human nature.

"Will you come and take pot luck with me at my club?"

Nascent hope stirred in Mame. Life could not be altogether a washout while twenty-two-carat fairy godmothers were out and about in it.

"I'd just love to do that." There was no mistaking the note of gratitude.

"Come along, then. But we shall probably get nothing to eat. Hen clubs are hen clubs when it comes to fodder."

"Anything in the way of a bone will fix me." A blessed feeling of hope had begun to stir in Mame quite strongly again.

The evening being fine and lit by British summertime which puts the clock back an hour, and as the club, by name the Ladies Imperium, was only a few doors beyond Hamilton Place, there seemed no reason why they should not walk.

Lady Violet said good-bye to her friends and several of them, including Bill and one or two of his brother officers, said good-bye to Miss Du Rance. And then these ladies strode off towards what the hostess prophesied would be the worst dinner in Europe.

Privately Mame doubted that. What she called the "worst" dinner and what Lady Violet called one were likely to come out of very different casseroles. A fortnight ago Miss Amethyst Du Rance might have argued the point, but in the past fourteen days a lot of water had flowed between the arches of London Bridge. She was not so certain of the things she knew and far more certain of the things she didn't know. Anyhow, she

was much less free with her opinions than she had been a fortnight ago.

They turned in at Albert Gate and took that pleasant path which the Metropolitan Force had managed to close against the wiser members of the public at nightfall. But night as yet had not fallen. None the less Miss Du Rance was stirred by certain memories. She kept a shrewd eye open for a certain dour-faced Scots constable.

There was not a sign of the young officer. Perhaps there was still a little too much light in the sky, away beyond the statue of Achilles. It might have been Mame's idiom, her personal force, her gift of mimicry, but all the way from the park gates to the marble portico of the Ladies Imperium her friend was kept in a state of mirth. Even when they had emerged from the cloak room and made their way up the fine staircase as far as the *salle à manger,* the hostess of Miss Du Rance was still inclined to smile. She was great fun, this girl.

The Club's most popular member had no difficulty in choosing a table for two, in a comfortable corner. As they sat down, she glanced at the menu. "You mustn't expect terrapin and canvasback here, you know," she said apologetically, handing the card to Mame.

Their first choice was plovers' eggs, with cutlets and a charlotte russe to follow; a light and eupeptic meal. Miss Du Rance was offered a dry Sauterne to go with it. But the guest, in spite of agreeable memories of a recent "cup," was by way of being a pussyfoot. That

creed was good for the health, good for the purse, good for the moral nature. Yet having no wish to cast a blight on Lady Violet's ardour, she saw no reason why her friend should not order something for herself.

Lady Violet said there was only one sort of wine she really liked and "fizz" was the name of it. And it was so expensive since the War that she only enjoyed drinking it when paid for by other people. But the Club had rather a reputation for barley water. To prove its *bona fides* she asked the waitress to bring some.

Mame accepted the first beaker of that mild beverage and found it good. The plovers' eggs, too, were excellent. Still, a quaint combination, as Lady Violet remarked. Yet could Cinderella have forgotten for one moment the nature of the ice beneath her slippers she would have given herself up to frank enjoyment of the nicest food she had had in years.

A spectre was there all the time. But Elmer P. on a Lodge night could hardly have been more full of quip than Lady Violet. Not only was she witty in herself, she seemed a cause of wit in others. First Family was writ large upon her, yet she was everybody's friend. She passed the time of day with the majority of her fellow members; she had a gay word or a bit of chaff for even the staidest of them; and in her frank and genial fashion she introduced "my friend Miss Du Rance of Chicago" to a discreetly chosen two or three.

As this delectable meal neared its end Mame was

hard set to keep the Cinderella feeling at bay. That forward-looking mind of hers could not help contrasting the blithe evening so rapidly wearing thin, with the endless procession of drab to-morrows which surely lay in wait for her. She loathed the thought of the count-every-dollar existence to which she was doomed to return. If only she had a couple of thousand or so laid up in the bank! For a chance had come to enter the life that had such a powerful knack of making every other seem not worth while.

In the midst of these prickly Cinderella thoughts, she woke with a little start to the fact that her vis-à-vis was gazing at her over the flowers in the centre of the table. That was an odd sort of look Lady Violet sometimes had. Once or twice already Mame had surprised it stealing across her face; and she couldn't help wondering what it meant.

"You'll have a cup of coffee, won't you?"

Mame was glad to have a cup of coffee, yet she was sure the look on the face of the fairy godmother had really nothing to do with that aromatic berry.

A waitress came with the coffee.

"Noir? Or sugar and milk?"

Miss Du Rance took plenty of sugar and plenty of milk. They had lingered over their meal. It had been very jolly; and although Mame had been oppressed throughout by a sense of destiny she had managed to keep up her end. Her free comments on men and women, on habits and customs, on powers and principalities had delighted the hostess. This quick-thinking

child from the back of beyond was an Original. And so plucky! And really pretty if she wouldn't trick herself out in that second-rate style!

The famous meerschaum holder was produced. Mame declined a *crème-de-menthe* and the mildest of all imaginable gaspers. Nay, she was in the act of trying to drown her gloom in barley water; a pretty hopeless task, for that beverage, sound as it may be, is no antidote for the blues, when hey! presto! the fairy godmother came back into the picture. And poor Cinderella suddenly began to sit up and take notice.

"Did I tell you that Cousin Edith is going abroad for the summer?"

Miss Du Rance had not been enlightened.

"Well, she is. Some friends of hers have a villa at Lausanne and next week she is off to stay with them until September. I shall miss her dreadfully. She is such a good sort. And of course she plays propriety at Half Moon Street. Personally I don't mind a row of beans, I defy the breath of scandal to touch sweet innocents like Davis and me; but my mother, you know, thinks it not quite nice. Anyhow, I am wondering if you feel inclined to tolerate Cousin Edith's room at the flat for a month or two?"

Feel inclined to tolerate! Cinderella's eyes began to glow, yet she kept a rigid silence. For she was plunged in some deep and rapid calculations.

"What do you say?"

"Glory, that's what I'd say." Mame could not dissemble her enthusiasm. As well, no doubt; since it

was the native force of that enthusiasm which had such a tonic effect upon her rather *blasé* friend.

"A firm offer if you care to take it." The tone was amused and casual. "Cousin Edith's mattress is a hard beast, and Davis and I are a pair of Bolshies before breakfast and a couple of bores after it, but we shall be full of gratitude if you'll come and stand between us and the milkman, who, according to Davis, is a bit of a Don Juan."

"Why of course I'll come. I'll simply love to. But—"

The meerschaum holder queried the weak word But.

"I'm kind of wondering about the dough."

"The dough?" Lady Violet collected new idioms for their own sake, but somehow this Americanism had eluded her.

"What you call 'the dibs' over here."

"My dear child, it won't cost you a sou. In fact, there's no reason why it shouldn't be money in your purse."

Mame's heart gave a leap. A fairy godmother with a vengeance!

"I don't get you." Cinderella spoke half forlornly, half with joy. "Your ways aren't my ways. I'm not half the go-getter that you are. Personally I have to look both sides of a dollar to see if it's wearing out in the middle."

"That'll be all right. If only you feel inclined to ease the white man's burden, in this case the white

woman's, you'll not need to trouble much about dollars."

All this seemed too good to be true, but Cinderella gave the fairy godmother a very respectful hearing.

"The fact is, at present I've more work than I can do. Or perhaps one ought to say more than one cares to do. It's the weekly letter to the provincial papers that's so troublesome. I don't mind the books and the plays and the harmless cackle about the inoffensive creatures with whom one occasionally dines out. Most of 'em seem rather to like it, if you go a bit careful with the trowel. But it's having to write puffs for tradesmen, boosting their white sales and their spring pyjamas, that makes one want to tear the bedclothes."

Mame listened with intensity, but she didn't speak. Lady Violet went on: "For weeks I've been thinking of advertising in the *Times* for a secretary. I don't want to let the thing go; it pays like fun; and if I can find some good sportsman who is not afraid of the donkey-work she shall have a hundred pounds a year and her keep.'

Mame was a complex of emotions. But the one uppermost was joy. Miracles are no longer in fashion, but just now they seemed to be happening at the rate of three per ten days.

"What do you say?"

It was the kind of billet Mame had been praying for every night these seven months past. But it was not until she had performed the operation of pinching herself mentally to find out if she was truly awake, that she quietly answered: "Search me. If I'm not a champ

on a Remington and don't write as slick as you can shoot it, I'll go back to Ioway by the next boat."

"A go then. Cousin Edith leaves Tuesday. When can you move in? But no doubt you'll like to think it over?"

Miss Du Rance, however, had done her thinking already. "Wednesday morning, at ten, I'll be around at Half Moon Street with my trunk—if that's agreeable."

"The sooner the better."

So there it was.

But what a funny world! Cinderella, secretly, was still in a maze. She couldn't get rid of the feeling that this new turn of the shuttle was a bit uncanny.

XXV

THE morning of Wednesday saw the punctual Mame moving into that smart apartment house 16b Half Moon Street W. In the process, alas, a hole was made in her few remaining dollars. But she was feeling pretty "good" and therefore a trifle reckless. The dream still held. Her luck continued right in. Most girls in her position would have given a year of their lives for such a chance; and she was quietly determined to make the most of it.

Some of the money, which, in spite of her run of luck, was giving her so much concern, was spent on lending a smarter appearance to her luggage and personal effects. It was not that she minded her hostess so much. She had proved herself a true democrat by cottoning to "little Miss Chicago" as she had humorously christened her. But the nigger in the woodpile was Davis. Her supercilious eyes were far more inquisitorial than those of her mistress. A suit case, of the right Bond Street breed, and some smart new "undies" might do something to appease the wretch. At least Miss Du Rance hoped fervently that they would, for deep in her ambitious young heart were fear and dislike of Davis.

However, in spite of straitened means, the new era

began promisingly. It was a relief to escape at last from the gloom and the hostility of Fotheringay House. Mame had never liked the place and the people and they had never liked her. She was so much "the wrong kind of American" that those who were rapidly losing anything in the way of social status they had ever possessed had to be on their guard. This odd Miss Du Rance belonged to the very large class of persons they simply could not afford to know.

With the new hostess, however, things were otherwise. Lady Violet could afford to know anybody and everybody. All she asked of whomsoever she knew was that they should be straight and if possible amusing. There was no question that Miss Du Rance from the outset had greatly amused her new friend. She had stimulated her too; such enthusiasm was infectious. Besides, she had ideas. Not all were practicable, but they were evidence of a modern and progressive outlook. In a word "little Miss Chicago" was a force, she meant something. Lady Violet, who, in the opinion of those among her many friends whose judgment was worth the most, "was as clever as they made 'em," had seen from the first that they might be of use to each other.

A few days of the new régime confirmed this view. Miss Amethyst Du Rance, called Mame for short, was a find. She was quick to learn, in some things she was curiously humble-minded; she had a charming animal zest in life and she was a very genuine worker. Indeed,

the little American really seemed to love work for its own sake.

From Lady Violet's point of view, this love of work was important. Like most Britishers, she herself had a hearty dislike of work; at the same time no one enjoyed the fruits of it more. It was a necessary evil which meant a life of independence. It meant a flat of one's own, money in one's purse, travel, a modest entertaining of one's friends.

The Trehernes were influential people, but of late years they had grown poor. Since the father's death, ten years ago, their mother had let the London house. By living a country life she had been able to keep things going during her son's minority. But now that Bill was of age, it was more than ever necessary for his mother to pare cheese. What with death duties and the cynicism of politicians who lived by robbing the people who were in a minority at the polls, they were hanging on by their eyelids to the proud position they had inherited. One of the string of girls had recently married, but it could not be said that the family circumstances were easy.

If Lady Violet was to have the kind of life she wanted she must work or marry. Of the two evils she chose the less. It was not that she disliked men. She was far too sensible to draw arbitrary distinctions between the sexes, but at heart she was celibate. And having brains enough to maintain herself in a fitting manner, for the present, at all events, she saw no reason

for bartering the personal freedom which meant more to her than anything else in life.

From the outset Mame proved her worth. In her own expressive phrase she was a "go-getter"; and with a little kindly mothering she soon began to develop her talent. All the "donkey-work" could safely be left to Mame. She didn't mind writing down a dozen columns a week to Lady Violet's fluent dictation; she didn't mind clucking it out on a typewriter. Then, too, she had real powers of her own. She could be trusted to deal first-hand with all sorts of minor functions, from a new film to a sale of lingerie, in an arresting and informative manner. She had much of the flair of the journalist born. Celimene's weekly letter grew infinitely less burdensome, and in certain respects more worth while.

Lady Violet generously acknowledged all this. And even if the new arrangement meant a slice out of her income she soon began to profit in other and unexpected ways. Miss Du Rance had ideas. Before long she revealed a power of turning them to commodity.

Mame had been a week under the happy and fruitful ægis of this new friend, when a second letter arrived from New York. Moreover, it contained a cheque. And this was welcome as flowers in May, particularly as it was made out for double the amount of the first.

Elmer P. Dobree had also written very nicely. The stuff was full of promise; but there was performance in it too. The editor of the *Monitor* was tickled to death by it and was asking for more. Of course "the

blue pencil" was still in use but Elmer P. was full of sage advice. Even in the Cowbarn days, he had been, but he had the art of giving it in a tactful way. Good old Elmer, what a white man he was! Mame gave a little sigh of gratitude as she fingered the cheque and then re-read the letter of the *Monitor's* new assistant editor.

When Lady Violet came out of her bath, over which she liked to spend at least half an hour between ten a. m. and eleven, the letter was handed to her.

"I've got an idea," Mame announced when the letter had been duly returned with her friend's congratulations. "And I want you to come in on it. Now listen, hon."

"Fire away," said Lady Violet, elegantly fixing her kimono-clad slimness in a bergère chair.

"Suppose we shoot that weekly syndicate letter upon New York? And why shouldn't they broadcast it all over the U. S.? Or why not a specialty with all the latest news and town gossip done in the Chickest style? You see what I mean? Or we might send two letters. 'Celimene' for New York and Boston and Chicago and Philadelphia and the highbrow cities; and 'Mame' for the small towns. Let us mail a couple of specimens right now to Elmer P. and put it up to him to work it his end. What do you say?"

Enkindled by Mame's enthusiasm, which began to rise to bubbling point, Celimene could only yield.

"Easy money, I'll tell the world." Mame's optimism was a tax upon the gravity of her friend.

"If we can put over the he-stuff we might persuade Elmer to have it cabled; and then I guess there'd be five hundred bucks a week for us cool."

"Five hundred bucks a week, honey, you don't say!" Celimene had a sense of humour. But she knew Mame well enough by now to appreciate that her flow of ideas must be taken seriously.

Over a pleasant luncheon at the Ladies Imperium, of which Mame had been already made an honourary, temporary member, they discussed the details of the plan.

"Now then, Celimene, come to it. We'll start in this very afternoon. One letter for New York and one for Cowbarn, Iowa. Let us turn in that grand new opera we saw last night at Covent Garden and the private interview you had with that mossy-faced old dago who said he was the composer."

Celimene approvingly helped Mame to some early asparagus. She owned she would never have thought of that.

"You would have, I expect," said Mame generously. "But we must do the thing well. We shall be up against all the regular columnists of the New York papers. And we must go over bigger and better and brighter and breezier. So full of natural pep must we be that Elmer's hair'll curl like a crocodile's tail."

Go to it they did. That afternoon they worked like moles. They skimmed the cream of all that was happening in London, England. Mame loosed her descriptive powers, which were considerable. She guessed she knew just how to tickle the hick towns;

while Lady Violet, who understood the taste of New York and Boston, artfully moderated the transports without taking out the pep.

Several items of spicy gossip were cunningly mingled with the regular news. "A little bird whispers that a certain Royal duke whose name must not be mentioned at the moment is paying court to the only daughter of a certain New Jersey banker. Wild horses will not force Celimene to divulge the name of the beaut in question, but her readers can be assured that when the hour of publication approaches they shall know a bit sooner than anyone else."

"A risk, I fear." Lady Violet was threatened with an attack of conscience. This tit-bit had gone round an exclusive dinner-table two nights before. It was some way ahead of the newspapers; it had been given more or less under the rose, and in Lady Violet's opinion was a dangerous card to play. With all her Bohemianism she had inherited an old-fashioned respect for certain privacies and decorums. "Our Ambassador at Washington, if he happens to see it, may ask questions. He might want to know who Celimene is. Then there would be fuss this side the water and a too-enterprising journalist might find her name omitted from the next Court. And from our point of view, that would be a pity."

Mame agreed. At all events with the latter part of the reasoning. The entrée was going to be one of the new firm's assets. At the same time, the item in ques-

tion was such a sure card to lead off with, that whatever happened she was sorely tempted to use it.

"That bit of eyewash is going to put the half-nelson on the *Monitor*." When excited, Miss Du Rance had a tendency to mix her metaphors.

Her experienced friend shook the head of worldly wisdom. "There is Buck House to think of. It would be so easy to lose more than we gain."

"We'll gain big money. New York'll give us a contract if we are first with the news. And I guess you've the influence to live down any bit of unpleasantness," Mame shrewdly appended.

Lady Violet shook her head. So much did conscience trouble her, that even Mame, in whom strong passions had been loosed, felt bound to respect it. A real pity, all the same. Here was a scoop. The risk, therefore, was worth taking. But now that Lady Violet was standing on a matter of principle, Mame saw that nothing was likely to be gained by argument.

Among other little bits of spice was one which Mame herself felt inclined to query. Celimene laughingly suggested that the alliance of one of Britain's marquises and a certain celebrated Three Ply Flannelette might be intelligently anticipated.

"Oh, but I'll say not."

"It is bound to happen, I assure you," affirmed the sister of the marquis in question.

" 'Tisn't how I read the lines in his hand. And the leaves in his teacup. And the spots on his cards."

Lady Violet smiled at this decisiveness. But Mame

was unmoved. "Besides," said she, "do you suppose New York and Bawston care a hoot which young skirt he's going to marry?"

"I agree. And yet not altogether if I may say so. Miss C. has American connections."

"American connections!" Mame suspected from the first that Miss Three Ply's trained-to-the-minuteness had not a European origin. "Go-getting with Poppa's millions, is she?"

"She is always spoken of as a fresh and charming English girl, but it wouldn't surprise one if the rumour of her engagement to Bill interested certain people of importance on Fifth Avenue."

"It'd surprise me. I'd be surprised considerable." Mame was careful to keep these musings to herself. "If ever I hear the Voice that breathed o'er Eden lifting off the roof of Saint Margaret's while that pair of galoots marches up the aisle you can call me Cissy."

So much for Mame's private thoughts. Wisely, however, they were careful not to get themselves uttered in those particular words.

XXVI

THESE were great days. It was not long before social engagements began to pour in upon Mame. She had surmised rightly that Lady Violet had influence. Indeed this new and most valuable friend seemed to have a finger in every pie. Her power of "wangling" things was extraordinary.

There could be no doubt about her popularity. And it was not confined to one class. The charlady at the flat, the young man who delivered the milk, the stalwart ex-soldier who worked the lift, right up to the formidable Davis and the princes of the earth were one and all devoted to her. For one thing she was the soul of good humour, with a word and a smile for everybody; and she had a divine faculty of loving a kind action for its own sake.

Lady Violet was a general favourite and she had many strings to pull. As far as Mame was concerned she pulled them freely. Little Miss Chicago began to be invited here, there, and everywhere. And surprisingly few questions were asked. At the outset, it is true, certain nicely brushed and plucked eyebrows—mostly those of Miss Du Rance's own countrywomen, who seemed to abound in Mayfair—were apt to go up at finding her sitting opposite them at dinner and at

luncheon. But the fact that she was a protégée of Lady Violet's seemed to accredit her, to account for her, as it were.

Mrs. Creber Newsum, quite frankly, had never heard the name Du Rance all the time she had lived in America. Lady Summerscale, née Vanderdecken, who owned to Chicago connections, had never heard of it either. As for the dear Duchess, whose great grandmother had taken out the original patent for the New York Four Hundred, she was sure, my dear, well she was quite, quite sure—!

Still, Mame had luck to begin with. And she had excellent brains. Above all she had a very judicious and clever sponsor. Lady Violet understood just how far she could go with her own particular world. She knew its little weaknesses and how to play upon them.

In launching, as much perhaps for her private amusement as for any other reason, "my friend Miss Du Rance of Chicago," into this expensive hothouse, she contrived to let it be known in her own two-edged phrase that this little American "was the richest thing that ever happened."

Certain people, to whom money was the beginning and the end of all things, were only too eager to accept the phrase at its face value. They took it quite literally. Somehow it so fully explained Miss Du Rance.

"Chicago, my dear." One lynx-eyed old dowager would whisper to another who had the ears of a fox.

"Poppa was hogs. One hears the money he made in the War was fabulous."

That accounted for Miss Du Rance. Five years had passed since the Armistice, but the Hogs, all frozen and pickled, that Britons of every rank and class had been compelled to digest and the prices they had had to pay for the privilege during the years of famine had crystallised already into one of the permanent traditions of the race.

Seeing is believing. The same applies to eating. "Hogs, my dear. Poppa was hogs." It seemed to follow, as night follows day, that little Miss Chicago simply could not help being the richest thing that ever happened. And it was wonderful how the rumour spread. Sophisticated souls looked upon Miss Du Rance with awe.

Mame, at first, was not aware of this interesting fact. Even she, cute as she was, did not immediately strike to the root of Lady Violet's subtlety. That little event was to come later. But even while Mame dwelt in a state of innocence, her uncanny sharpness gave her a perception of the rôle to play.

As far as Mayfair was concerned Miss Du Rance was the only one of her kind. She was something new. And the society in which she began to move had a love of novelty. Behind little Miss Chicago, however, was something more substantial than mere novelty. So cunningly did Lady Violet handle the rumour of her dollars that it seemed not only to vindicate Miss Du Rance, it also served to explain her. Great wealth

was needed to carry off such naïveté. Did not the one connote the other? Unless in a literal sense she was the richest thing that ever happened she could never have penetrated so far into the arcana of London's exclusiveness. And without a colossal fortune how could she afford to be the child of nature that she was?

It was whispered that Pop had begun the War a simple farmer of hogs and had ended by cornering them. The rapidity of his rise into one of the great magnates of the Middle West explained his early decease. It also explained his daughter. Dear Violet was receiving a pretty penny for towing her round, it was said. Everybody, of her own sex, envied and admired the courage of that lady. But the more sporting members were laying rather long odds that her protégée would not be presented at any one of the Season's drawing rooms; while the most speculatively inclined were ready to lay rather shorter odds that *la belle Américaine* would not even be seen at one of the minor Buck House garden parties.

Beyond a hint from Lady Violet, at the beginning of this odyssey in her young life, Mame had nothing to go on; but it was wonderful how soon she saw what was expected of her. There was, her sponsor had laughingly said, a far better chance of Miss Du Rance of Chicago receiving a ticket for the Royal Enclosure at Ascot from the Lord Chamberlain if she "stood," as it were, upon Pop's mythical wealth, than if she took the humbler rôle of weekly correspondent of the New York *Monitor*. Nay, to be frank, and

Lady Violet generally was in her arch way, journalism cut no ice in the circles in which Mame was ambitious to move. Those circles were rippling with inside information; the value of the entrée, journalistically speaking, could hardly be exaggerated; but Mame should remember that the key was wrought of dollars rather than of sensitive grey matter.

A nod is as good as a wink sometimes. Mame promptly took the hint. She was beginning to set her heart on big things. These ambitions would mean a considerable increase of expenditure, because even the appearance of money cannot altogether be counterfeited. But every nickel spent now would be a means to a definite end. Yet there were anxious moments to begin with; and it was well that she had a solid rock upon which to lean.

Financially Mame's burdens had been much lightened by the generosity of her friend. She had no house-room to pay for; Cousin Edith's vacant bed was at her disposal gratis. Then, too, she was very well paid for her labours upon the weekly syndicate letter.

Quite at the outset of what by all the omens should have been a smooth and prosperous voyage there came a threat of shipwreck. It so happened that when the specimen letter to New York, which finally they decided to sign with the nom de plume Clio, had been carefully pondered and copied and sealed ready for dispatch, Mame suddenly went back on her too hasty decision to let Lady Violet have things all her own way.

In deference to her scruples the most valuable of their assets had been scrapped; the rumour of a Royal duke's engagement to one of America's queens had been cut out.

At the last moment, however, such a piece of quixotism was a little too much for Mame's news sense. She realised the enormous value of this item. They were playing for a high stake and yet they were deliberately throwing away the ace of trumps. Surely it was worth taking a risk. Principles are good things, no doubt, but in up-to-date press work they can be overdone.

Lady Violet, as it chanced, was in a hurry to dress for the play and an early dinner in the entourage of a newspaper magnate; and Mame, who had no engagement of her own that evening, undertook personally to register the parcel, so that there should be no mistake about its getting to New York.

Alone with the parcel, alas, the devil tempted her. Why, oh why, throw away such a chance as might never recur! She turned to the wastepaper basket, fished out the discarded item and re-read it wistfully. Beyond a doubt it was the very bit of sugar they most wanted. As she scanned her native skies there was not an editor in New York who would not fall for that piece of news. Hardening her heart, she sat down at the typewriter, made a fair copy of the crumpled script, and then, breaking the sealed packet, she inserted the forbidden "par" and sealed it again.

Even in the midst of the rash act, conscience threat-

ened Mame with whips and scorpions to follow. But, after all, it was an equal partnership; she knew better than her friend what the effect would be in New York. Besides, why make a mountain out of a molehill? Even if there was a shine over this spicy par, they would no doubt be able to survive it. In any case there was likely to be very substantial compensation. For in Mame's view that tit-bit would clinch the matter. It had a real chance of putting them in solid with the most worth-while newspapers in America. They would be able to get a fine contract for their weekly cable and then could snap their fingers at all the moguls between Washington and Windsor.

Once the fell deed was done, however, and the parcel dispatched from the post office in Dover Street, Mame's conscience got busy. It came down upon her like a ton of bricks. She had done a thing that even complete success would not justify; she had gone back on her word; she had been disloyal; she had proved that she was simply not to be trusted. And if the game went wrong, and Lady Violet had shown conclusively that it was a highly dangerous one to play, most likely the too-clever Miss Du Rance would get it where the chicken got the axe.

Mame was not in the habit of repenting her actions. Long ago she had steeled her will against a pernicious harbouring of regrets; but she had some pretty bad moments to pass through. Retribution visited her pillow nightly.

Never in her life had she been lacking in courage,

moral or physical. But now came signs of a yellow streak. She dare not tell Lady Violet what she had done. With all her genuine kindness, her gay insouciance, Mame was yet sure that she was not a kind of girl who could be trifled with. And look at the matter in what light one would, this trick was not quite on the level.

"Serve me right if I'm fired," was Mame's constant thought. "I ought to have put myself in solid before I tried these fancy strokes. And it isn't Class, anyway."

However, there it was. Even if a greedy little puss in her haste to get at the cream had upset the jug altogether, it was no use miaouing. All the same it took some of the warmth out of the sunshine of the Green Park; the band of the Pinks did not seem to play ragtime quite so rhythmically; the excitements of the new orientation were less stimulating than they should have been; the hope of an invitation to the Royal garden party less exhilarating; the world hardly so full of colour and romance as the circumstances warranted.

Had it not been for this large fly in the ointment, the new life would have been a thing of joy. The times were stirring. Luncheons, matinées, dinners, dances, parties crowded one another. Lady Violet, indeed, had influence. On each occasion, it is true, Mame had more or less to run the gauntlet, but she had the spirit of a fighter and she bore herself right gallantly.

Each week she got prettier; each week her confi-

dence grew. Like all the rest of her countrywomen, of whatever grade they belonged, she had a very keen social sense. In a time surprisingly short, as viewed by the more conservative and less daring Briton, she began to get the hang of things. With just a little help, she soon learned what could be worn and what could not, what could be said and what could not, what could be done and what could not.

It was a pity that she had already done one of the things she ought not to have done. Otherwise everything in the garden would have been just lovely.

Even as it was the garden was real nice. She promised to become a favourite at some of the smart houses within a stone's throw of her present abode. At the Orient Dance Club, in particular, she was *un succès fou.* Her style of moving was admired, her sayings were quoted; her personality, which seemed to develop and make more impact each time she appeared, began to wax in the public eye.

She was no longer the small-town rustic. Nor was she the struggling New York journalist who had to gaze wistfully at both sides of a dollar. The rôle of Miss Du Rance of Chicago suited her infinitely better. Even Miss Childwick, by nature a trifle supercilious, poor dear, had to defer to her in certain ways. Miss Du Rance was so much quicker in the uptake, so much more forceful, altogether so much cleverer. A slightly strained look began to appear in the eyes of Miss Three Ply Flannelette whenever her name was mentioned.

All the same, as Mame foresaw, the pace was a bit too hot to last. Something was due to happen. She was rather a fatalist by nature; and having gone out of her way to find trouble, she fully expected to fetch up pretty soon against a round nugget.

Why had she not let well alone! The truth was bound, sooner or later, to come out. Every time Davis, who had the look of a baby-eating ogress, came into the room with letters on a silver tray, Mame had a presentiment that some old Court fool of an ambassador had written to complain. And when that happened, as conscience said it sure must, Lady Violet being the kind of girl she was, there would be ructions.

To make things worse, although nearly four weeks had flown since "Clio's" specimen copy had been urgently posted to New York, no word had yet been received on the subject. What did Elmer P. think of that *ballon d'essai?* as Lady Violet called it. What a fool Miss Slick Puss would look if, even with a bit of illicit spice stuck in the middle of her cake, Clio was turned down after all!

XXVII

"DAMN!" said Lady Violet.

The tone of annoyance caused Mame to glance up from her typewriter, rather apprehensively, towards her friend. Conscience makes cowards of us all. Lady Violet was frowning over something in the morning paper. And the long-expected blow was overdue.

"The cat's out of the bag. How disgusting."

Mame did not feel like innocence, but according to one of the wise guys of the office calendar, speech is given one to conceal one's thoughts.

What cat? Out of what bag? What was disgusting?

Monsieur Talleyrand, the name of the guy in question, would not have disowned his pupil. Than Mame's lisping tones, nothing could have been simpler or more concealing.

"You remember that Royal engagement?"

"What Royal engagement?"

"The one we had so much difficulty in deciding whether it would be cricket to divulge to New York?"

Ye-es, Mame seemed rather vaguely to remember.

"Well, the *Times* says it has the approval and the sanction of their Majesties."

"Can't think what the boy sees in her, I'm sure." Mame spoke cautiously. "If that really was the girl we saw the other night. Not what I call a looker, anyway."

"No accounting for taste," said Lady Violet philosophically; and then less philosophically, "but what really annoys me—"

Mame fetched a deep breath. "Shouldn't let anything annoy you, honey, if I were you. 'Tisn't worth getting worried over anything, not this time on earth."

"Well, I *am* annoyed. And it's simply no use pretending. This new firm of ours, Mame et Celimene, called Clio for short, has just missed the biggest scoop of its young life."

"I don't get you." Mame's frown was portentous. She was doing her best, all the same, in a quiet fashion, to adjust her agile mind to the rather unexpected turn the conversation was taking.

"Don't you see, my child, if we hadn't been so frightfully conscientious, we should have been a clear fortnight ahead of everybody. Think what a reputation we should have made in New York on the strength of it. If only we had kept that rumour in, and damned the consequences of there being nothing in it, now that it is officially confirmed we should be on velvet with every editor from New York City to Tombstone, Texas."

"Whose fault was that, honey?" Mame's voice was very soft and beguiling.

"Not yours, my dear." Lady Violet was ruefully

candid. "And never again will I be so high principled. When I am it will be time to quit international journalism."

"Yes, that's where you got off."

When Mame had time to think over the situation at her leisure, one factor in it appeared to be sticking out a mile. The case was altered; at least in some degree. No trouble need be looked for now, at all events from high places; and as Lady Violet was wearing sackcloth already for her own excess of scruple, it was quite likely that, even when the full truth came out, Mame would have nothing to fear. Indeed, the whole business had now begun to look much healthier. If the packet to New York had not miscarried, certain developments of a very pleasing kind were bound to ensue. And if she played her cards adroitly with Lady Violet, her lapse might hope to be forgiven.

Still, at this stage, it just didn't do to be too sure.

XXVIII

MAME'S hope of developments began to materialise about noon the next day. At that hour Davis appeared with the silver tray whereon was a cablegram addressed "Durrance."

Cool on the surface, but with trembling fingers and beating heart, Mame tore open the envelope and read:

Make no contracts with anybody until you know what I can do. Writing this mail.

DOBREE.

Mame smiled sweetly upon Davis. "No answer." Then still very calm on the surface she pressed the cable into the hand of Lady Violet.

Her partner and friend put down the novel she was studying for review purposes, and read the communication from New York through twice.

"I hope your friend Elmer P. Dobree isn't pulling our legs," she said perplexedly.

"Shows how little you know that baby." Mame tried her best to dissemble a rising excitement. "Elmer P. takes life that serious he might be Abraham Lincoln at the age of twenty-nine."

"One wishes he would express himself less cryptically."

"You'll be wise in time, honey," drawled Mame slowly. Wild horses were inclined to tear her, but she had a will.

And a will was wanted, sure, to wait six long and weary days for the promised letter of Elmer P.

The six days of waiting were not so long and weary as they might have been. To begin with, they were full of the joys of anticipation. The anticipation, moreover, took more forms than one. As if to show how little Miss Du Rance and her sponsor had to fear in the way of displeasure in high places, there came by post, within an hour of the cable from New York, a real gilt-edged command to the second Royal garden party to be held at Buckingham Palace on the fifth of July.

The "command" tried the democratic spirit of Miss Du Rance severely. Even in the most vaulting moments of her optimism she had not seen herself moving in Royal circles quite so soon as all that. She was nearly betrayed into a whoop of elation. Cuckoo, yes, but somehow it expressed her oddly democratic feeling. However, she was able to pull herself up just in time. What were kings and queens, anyway? Still she could not help giving her amused friend a tentative hug.

"Please don't put the bear-cat act over on me," ex-

postulated Lady Violet, who had devoted a good deal of the last four weeks to a study of Mame's idiom.

"It's a long way to the fifth of July, any old how," said Mame with stern self-control. "And I'll bet our noo ambassaderess don't invite me to the carol singing and the fireworks on the Fourth at the Embassy. Even if good Queen Mary ain't scared of me, *she*'ll be, I guess."

"It ought to be easy to wangle a card for an American citizeness. How much will you bet?"

"I don't approve betting." Mame had too much respect for her friend's astonishing powers of "wangling." "But if you can get me an invite for the Fourth among all the doughnuts and the high-fliers and the hundred-per-cents I'll be that set up I'll not know where to hide my simple face."

Lady Violet promised modestly to see if anything could be done in the matter.

One way and another Mame contrived to get through those intervening days pretty well; yet it seemed that the eagerly awaited letter from New York would never arrive. Her imagination could not help playing around it. The cable had excited great hopes.

In such a world as the present, however, things seldom pan out as they should. Mame had visions of a contract that would astonish Fleet Street; but Elmer's offer, when it came, was considerably less than she expected. But in Lady Violet's opinion it was distinctly good.

However, Lady Violet did not know the precise circumstances in which the offer had been made. She was still in the dark as to the brilliant coup Mame had illicitly brought off. Therefore Mame had no hesitation in turning it down.

"No, honey, we are out for something bigger. I think I'll cable Elmer our rock-bottom terms."

"Pray what do you consider they ought to be?"

"We must have a two-year contract to cable six columns every Friday at six hundred dollars a week."

Lady Violet was frankly astonished. "Surely, we can't hope to get that?"

"Oh, we'll get it, or I should worry." Mame sounded wonderfully cheerful. "I'll go right along now and send that cable."

"But suppose we kill the nice goose that is going to lay the golden eggs?"

Mame was prepared to risk that. "We are worth every dime of the money. And they know it just as well as we do."

Her friend did a sum in her head. "Do you realise that you are demanding thirty thousand dollars a year?"

"So much as all that," laughed Mame. But she was not to be dissuaded. "Audacity, audacity, always audacity," had been among the mottoes of the office calendar. Besides, had they not exclusive news to offer and had not New York just had dramatic evidence of its value?

That, of course, was the crux of the whole matter. And it was a point upon which Lady Violet was very much in the dark. In Mame's judgment the time had not yet come to enlighten her. She would have to know presently, but this was not the moment for a certain rather awkward disclosure.

XXIX

CELIMENE prophesied disaster when the enterprising partner showed her the cable she proposed to send.

"Leave this to me, honey." Mame sounded absurdly full of confidence. "I know New York better than you. If New York wants a thing it wants it. And if it thinks a thing worth while it don't mind what it pays."

"But are we so worth while as all that?"

Mame appeared to have not the least doubt on the point. She clapped on her hat, sallied forth and sent the cable.

In four and twenty hours, less forty-five minutes, came the answer. Four hundred dollars a week were offered with a contract for one year.

Mame was triumphant. "What did I tell you, honey? They sure want us bad."

Lady Violet marvelled. "Let us make haste and accept it, before they change their minds," was her advice.

But Mame did not agree. "Those boobs are going up. They know we are the goods, else they wouldn't have been so free with their cables at the onset."

"But—!" persisted Lady Violet.

Mame took paper and pen. She spent a tense five minutes on a piece of careful if rather syncopated prose.

Original terms rock bottom. Sorrow. Du Rance.

Lady Violet was constrained to laugh rather wryly over the fruit of her labours. "Ours, I fancy, will be the sorrow."

The undefeated little go-getter laughed, too, but for a different reason. Once more she rose and crammed on her hat. Again she sallied forth to the convenient post office round the corner in Dover Street, while her friend was left wondering how she dared!

A further twenty-four hours went by. Plus twenty-five minutes on this occasion, to be exact. And then appeared the stern Davis with cablegram number three.

A Napoleon-at-Austerlitz look came upon Mame. "Keep the messenger," she instructed Davis before opening the envelope. Full of will as she was, there could be no denying that her hand trembled and that her face was pale. Suddenly she gave a whoop of triumph. "There, honey, what did I tell you?" She tossed the cablegram to Celimene. "Seems to me that old office calendar is right every time."

Lady Violet read amazedly:

Terms accepted. Cable confirmation. Dobree.

Napoleon-at-Austerlitz poised a majestic pencil and then dashed grandly:

Mail two years contract instanter. DU RANCE.

The pregnant words were duly submitted to Celimene.

"Now then, honey, what about it?"

Lady Violet acknowledged her defeat with a cheerful grace. These Americans were wonderful!

Mame produced a pound note and gave it to Davis along with the cable. "For the messenger," she said. But just as the emissary was passing out of the door she changed her mind. "Come to think of it, I'll send that cable myself."

The paper was handed back; and the redoubtable Davis went to dismiss the messenger, while yet again Miss Du Rance proceeded to clap on her hat. She had called to mind that an Anonymous highbrow had laid it down in the office calendar that if you want a thing done well you must do it yourself.

The office calendar had a sure trick of being infallible. Hence the quick but firm steps of Mame along Half Moon Street, towards that so conveniently near-at-hand post office.

XXX

MAME had hardly committed half a dozen pregnant words to the efficient care of the ladylike girl at the post office, when suddenly she came to an important decision. Let her regularise the situation then and now. She would go straight home and clear up Lady Violet's perplexities. Success had amply crowned her audacity, but there was still the uncomfortable feeling that she had played not quite fair. An explanation was overdue. Now was the time to make it.

The job was not easy to tackle. If it were done at all it must be done quickly. And so, immediately she got back from her errand, she plunged right in. Briefly and lightly as possible she made the confession.

"Do I understand you re-opened the packet and put in what we had decided to leave out?" Lady Violet's eyes grew wide and round. The change of tone was perceptible.

"I sure did. And there's no call to be sorry."

"Perhaps not, but there might have been." Lady Violet's slow voice deepened rather ominously while it made that comment.

"We took our chance and here we are." Mame's

air of triumph was a shade uneasy; it sounded a trifle forced. "Now we're in solid with New York. We've pulled the big stuff, you can tell the world."

Lady Violet could not resist a laugh. But at the back of everything she was not laughing at all. She was rather sore. And she was rather angry. No use disguising it, there the feeling was. They had brought off a scoop of which they had every right to be proud. But somehow the whole thing was against her code. One could not help liking and admiring this girl, but the line would have to be drawn somewhere!

She looked at her ingenious partner with narrowing eyes. The note in her voice disconcerted Mame considerably, when she said, "I don't quite think I can be in this."

Mame had a pang, sharp and odd. She did not like the sound of that voice. Much less did she like the sound of the words. Lady Violet was absolutely indispensable to her now. Without her loyal help the contract could never be put through. And if she should cut loose and decide to turn her out of doors, as a girl with that look on her face conceivably might, the entire house of cards would collapse. Miss Du Rance was not yet established in anything. She would lose all she had gained. Society, at one word from Lady Violet, would fire her. Even her syndicate work would be lost. She would be back where she began.

Alarmed by that tone and that look Mame felt the cold touch of panic. She had made a hideous blunder. By a foolish miscalculation of human nature it

seemed as if she had just spoiled everything. In the flush of success she had been over-confident. She ought to have remembered that high-grade folks differed in certain ways from the common run. Yes, she had been a little fool.

XXXI

THEY went to the club, round the corner, for luncheon. But as they walked towards it together, for the first time since they had come to know one another they found themselves at a loss for words. For Mame it was a new experience and a decidedly bitter one. Lady Violet was now coldly polite. The touch of ice was an omen. Her companion did not like this new aspect at all.

Everything had changed since Mame had tripped along to the post office, half an hour ago. The sky was different or what London is pleased to call the sky; the sound of traffic; the look of the passers-by; the shadows cast by the houses and by the trees across the road, all were different. A severe attack of cold feet had overtaken Miss Du Rance.

She felt like throwing herself under a bus. Her vein of fatalism mockingly assured her that such luck as she had had could not possibly last. There was bound to be a break. The dream was too good to be true. Yet it was maddening to feel that she had held every card in the game less than half an hour ago and that by an act of sheer folly she had simply cast them to the winds.

This was a bad moment. Back swung the pen-

dulum. Her mood reacted from triumph to despair. After crabbing such luck as no girl of her sort ever had, she might find herself curled up on a County Council bench among the poor stiffs who slept nightly on the Thames Embankment. Instead of having the ball at her feet she had now a vision of ending up in the river.

In the course of a miserable luncheon these horrid thoughts tormented her. She couldn't go back to poverty and inferior people. But all that she had, depended on the coldly polite girl opposite. And if, as now seemed almost certain, she was forced to cancel the contract she had just made with New York, Elmer Dobree would be furious. He, too, would never forgive her for being made to look a fool. Big interests stood behind him in this scheme, and if by her default he failed to put it through, his own position would be jeopardised. He might even lose his new job.

"Excuse me, honey." Mame glanced at her friend across the private table. "I don't want food just now. I think I'll get out into the air."

"Aren't you well?" The detached tone was like a knife to Mame.

"No," she gasped. "I'm feeling pretty low. I—I—" Not trusting herself to say more she got up abruptly and quitted the dining room.

XXXII

FOODLESS and miserable Mame left the precincts of the Ladies Imperium and crossed over to the Green Park. The sun had a real touch of warmth in it. Flowers, bird music, the gentle breath of spring were all around. But Mame subsided in the first seat she came to beyond the railings and had desperately to fight a threat of tears.

What a mess she had made of things! In one brief hour she had been cast down from the heights. She felt that all was lost. Yes, all, including honour. There was no excuse for what she had done. She had been tempted and she had fallen.

For about twenty minutes she sat there in despair. And then a diversion came. It was the sort of diversion that in this dark hour she would have given much to avoid. But it seemed there was no escape. It had to be met.

Right in the midst of her painful reflections her eye was caught by a tall, free-striding, oncoming figure. Moreover, the recognition was mutual and it was simultaneous. Bill had seen her in the very moment that she had seen him. He had a bulldog on a lead, a large, ugly, yet most amiable beast. Both Bill and his dog seemed on very good terms with life.

Bill in particular looked pleased with his luck in finding little Miss Chicago sitting alone on a seat in the Green Park, at one thirty-five in the afternoon.

He as good as said so.

Mame was not much given to tears. Her life had always been too hard for luxuries of that kind. But seldom had she been nearer shedding them. Bill, however, must not guess that anything was wrong. Yet, for all her powers of dissimulation, which were not inconsiderable, he was not wholly deceived.

"You want some lunch," he said in the casual manner that belonged to his sister and yet with a half humorous directness peculiarly his own. Mame liked that directness exceedingly. And never more than now. There was something very masculine about it, something genuine, something protective. It was not the least of the penalties she had incurred that she would have to forego the society of Bill. And of the likes of Bill.

"Well, what about it?" he broke in upon the distinct pause that had followed his statement. "Let's nip across to the Berkeley and have a bite. Or the Ritz —if you prefer it?"

Mame did not feel like the Berkeley, nor yet like the Ritz.

"I'm not hungry," she said with a lack of nuance for which she despised herself.

"Well, I am. About this hour I often get like that. Come and have a small lobster. It'll do you good, I'm sure."

The invitation was declined. Conversationally he could not knock any sparks out of the pretty and clever little American, whom he liked as much as any girl he had come across lately.

Bill was concerned. She looked as if she would be all the better for a good cry. Something had happened, something pretty serious, but there was no means of knowing what. And such a pretty little puss! There was a touching look about her. Bill was a chivalrous young man; and at that moment he felt he could ask nothing better than to stand between this attractive little girl and the rubs of a hard world.

Notwithstanding an honest need of luncheon Bill could not deny any solace it might be his to afford. He took a seat by the side of Miss Du Rance and prattled charmingly on.

"You're goin', of course, to that dance on the second at Clanborough House?"

Miss Du Rance said rather miserably that she didn't know.

"Don't know." Consternation was in the tone. "I understood from Vi that you were going with her."

Mame shivered slightly in her thin spring suit. But the winds of Britain cannot be trusted right up till the end of June.

"It'll be the best rag of the season. All the folks will be there. You must come—you simply must. Best floor in London. Capital supper. Rippin' band. Uncle J. and Aunt E. always do things top hole. Jolly sitting-out place in the small library downstairs.

Everybody don't know it, though, which makes it so much the jollier."

But Miss Du Rance did not respond. There was something seriously wrong with the girl.

"I was hopin' you'd dance two or three times with me. I know I'm a hod-carrier, but you'll own that I've improved quite a bit since you took me in hand."

Miss Du Rance did own that. But there was certainly room for improvement in Bill's form on the parquet, even if she was too kind to say so. Besides, she really liked the boy. There was that about him no girl could help liking. He was so open, so genuine, so manly.

"If you're not there it'll be most disappointing."

"There'll be Miss Childwick to console you," jumped to the tip of Mame's tongue. Happily she was able to keep it from slipping off.

The abrupt and sharp thought of Miss Three Ply Flannelette of the glorious yet supercilious eyes somehow gave Mame a jolt. And that was exactly what she needed. It lent her a punch. The memory of Miss Three Ply Flannelette pulled her together as nothing else could have done.

Even if she had just had a heavy blow, she must not think of giving in. All was not lost yet, whatever line Lady Violet might adopt towards her. There was something about Bill's manner that had set her agile and enterprising mind to work.

A week or so ago Lady Violet had been good enough to throw out a sort of gentle hint that little cats were

not allowed to look at a certain Canary. There were other nice birds in the aviary. In fact at this season of the year the place was swarming with 'em good and plenty. The little Puss in question could take her pick, always provided she was clever enough to catch one. But let her please remember that a certain Canary was not on the menu.

Yes, that was all very well; but circumstances have a knack of altering cases. The heart of Puss began to harden at the thought. Such a simple, harmless, pretty bird! And actually perching, mark you, on one of her velvet forepaws.

The clocks of the neighbourhood chimed two.

"How the time does fly," Bill observed.

"You don't say," remarked the little Puss.

The old note, the old quaint note at which the young marquis invariably chuckled. Such an Original, this girl. Everybody was beginning to say so—quite apart from her money! And Poppa's hogs had kept poor old Europe for years.

Bill reluctantly rose. "Yes, two o'clock, by gad!" He really must see about a small lobster. At three he had to meet a girl at Hurlingham and watch the polo. "The Yanks, I fear, have got us beat to a frazzle."

"Shouldn't wonder at all." The little Puss began circumspectly to lick her sly lips. And then with seeming carelessness: "Do I know the lady?"

"A Miss Childwick. You've barged into her once or twice at the Dance Club."

"You mean she has barged into me."

"That's exactly what I do mean," said Bill with candour. "Nice girl, but she can't begin to move in the way that you do. You might be a professional."

"Thank you," said Miss Du Rance coldly. It was a two-edged compliment.

"What I mean to say is Gwendolen—"

"Her name's Gwendolen!"

"And I are not exactly thistledown when we float around, while you are just as light as a feather. And if you don't show up on the second, it'll knock the bottom out of the jolliest dance of the year."

"You get after that lobster or you'll be late for the good old walloping America's going to give you."

"Sure you won't come and share a humble crust at the Berkeley?"

Miss Chicago was quite sure.

"Well, so long. But if you don't show up on the second it'll be real mean."

With every appearance of reluctance Bill and his dog moved slowly away in a northwesterly direction.

The eyes of Miss Du Rance followed them wistfully until they passed from view. Then she got up and took the opposite path, which led among other places to the Army and Navy Stores. Already a new fire had been kindled in her strong young heart.

XXXIII

IT was rather late in the afternoon when Mame returned to Half Moon Street. She had powlered up and down a bit, had had a cup of tea at the Stores, and had given some time to examining various novelties with an eye to Celimene's weekly letter. But she was still feeling decidedly miserable.

Lady Violet was out. She generally was at this hour of the day. Mame took off her hat and then sat doggedly down at the typewriter. There was plenty of work to be done; and she decided to go on doing it just as if nothing had happened.

It was not easy, however, to fix her mind on her job. Something had told her that she was going to be "fired"; and probably quite soon. She was really more occupied with what could be saved from the wreck than with the task in hand. But however she looked at the matter, there was no escaping the fact that it was in Lady Violet's power to ruin her socially.

Unless!

It was also in Lady Violet's power to ruin her professionally, unless Elmer P. was willing to forgive her for making him look a fool. In any case she would have earned the reputation of being a regular fly-up-the-creek; and she knew enough of her calling by this

time to be aware that such a name was about the worst possible for a newspaper girl.

While Mame was wrestling with these unhappy thoughts Lady Violet came into the room. She hardly ventured to look at the face of her friend. Somehow she was afraid to read her doom, which in her present mood was going to be more than she could bear.

Lady Violet gazed upon the rather woe-begone little figure seated before a piece of mechanism which she herself profoundly disliked. "Hard at it!" The tone was cheery, but it was non-committal. It was impossible for Mame to tell what her feelings were or what the decision was to which she had come.

Mame had very little hope. But, although she was careful not to betray it, she had a certain amount of defiance. As she bent over the machine she felt the eyes of Lady Violet upon her. After all, why should this girl sit in judgment? So far she had only had to play at life. She had never had to wonder where the next crust was coming from; she had never had to drudge at things she hated; she had never really known what it was to be tempted. Boredom, squalor, misery, what did this high-flyer know of these?

Mame was feeling sore. And there was a kind of savage pride in her, which forbade the showing of her heart. She would ask no concession. How could she, without lowering herself in her own eyes? If the sentence was ruin she would accept it. She must find the strength to pack her traps and walk out of that alluring house just as if nothing had happened.

All the same these thoughts hurt so much that her eyes began to fill with tears. They were the first which had gathered there since the weary days of childhood that now seemed very far away. Suddenly quite a large one dripped on to the machine. Mame fiercely brushed it off with her handkerchief. But it was too late. The mischief was done.

There was a pause. It was rather strained and rather odd. And then she woke to the fact that Lady Violet was speaking. Moreover, she was speaking in the gay and whimsical voice that Mame had grown to love.

"Little Puss, I've been thinking about things. I'm more to blame than you. One had no right to tempt you like that."

This aspect of the case had not occurred to Mame. It was a generous interpretation of the matter; it was, also, a diplomatic one which skilfully opened a short way out.

"No, you just hadn't," said Mame. "But don't think I excuse myself. I expect," she added wistfully, "you'll never be able to trust me again."

That was precisely the thought which was now troubling Lady Violet. But she had not the heart to be really hard. There was something brave and big about the child; a gameness, a never-say-die-ness which appealed to one's sporting instincts. She was immensely worth helping. But to go into partnership with her?—that was a thorny question. One had to be able to trust blindly in such a case.

"No, I'll say not." Mame read her thoughts. "And after this I have a kind of hunch that I can't trust myself."

Lady Violet looked shrewdly at Mame. She recognised, at any rate, her own weakness, and to that extent there was hope for her. Besides, the particular circumstances need not arise a second time. The next "bonanza" that came along, if she had the least doubt about giving it publicity, let her have the good sense to keep to herself. It was hardly fair to put temptation in the way of one whose genius for news made her so susceptible.

Reflection convinced Lady Violet that this was a case for broad views. A woman who really knows the world does not ask too much of human nature. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. And the childish air of penitence was so appealing that Lady Violet was tempted to put the best face she could on the matter.

Mame, after all, was not fired. Good sense and good will on one side, repentance on the other, did much to heal the breach. The friendship continued; they were able to work together as of yore.

In some ways their respect for each other deepened. The business pact into which they now entered was almost ideal. Mame's head, from the mundane aspect of dollars, was by far the shrewder of the two. Money meant so much more to her than it did to Lady Violet. She had learned a sharp lesson; also she was "clever as she could stick" and a splendid worker. From a

business point of view she was undoubtedly a treasure.

Mame, for her part, was quick to perceive that the partner pulled her weight in the boat. Celimene was strongest wherein she lacked. Taste, style, charm, discretion were worth-while things in high-grade newspaper work. Lady Violet had all these. And still better, she had access to sources of information which the ordinary journalist could seldom tap. She was asked everywhere, known everywhere, not in her capacity of Celimene of the London *Courier* or Clio of the New York *Monitor,* but as the daughter of her late father, a distinguished man, of her much-respected mother and by virtue of many highly placed connections. Apart from her skill with a pen, she was a most accomplished diner-out; one of the few real conversationalists of either sex left in London. Witty, informed, she repeated her father's popularity twenty years before. Powerful friends who remembered and admired him were glad to open their doors and their hearts to her.

There was every reason why the new firm should prosper. And it did. Even if New York was paying "big money" on the strength of the "scoop" in the matter of the Royal engagement, there was reason to think it would not have to regret its enterprise.

"We've now to see that we deliver the goods," said Mame. "Our London Letter's got to be the best on the market."

Mame went all out. Little Miss Chicago was to be seen everywhere. She, too, was careful not to asso-

ciate herself with the London *Courier* or the New York *Monitor*. By now she was established more or less as "the richest thing that ever happened." The cunning phrase had come to her by a side wind. Even if secretly it wounded her pride, she had a shrewd perception of its value.

That two-edged phrase was her open sesame, as Family was the open sesame of Lady Violet. The world in which she was now beginning to move with some freedom was willing to forgive much for the sake of Pop. Yet absolutely nothing was known at the Embassy about the mysterious Mr. Du Rance. Certain countrywomen of "little Miss Chicago" were indefatigable in their inquiries. But in the end all boiled down to the plain fact that Du Rance *père* was a homely farmer of hogs who, no doubt, had come into his kingdom rather late in life.

Meanwhile his daughter got about. Even the dance at Clanborough House, on the evening of the second of June, was graced by her presence. Dear Emily, who, as all the world knew, was apt to fuss over the invitations to share her well-considered hospitality, actually sent a card to the naïve little thing when people like the So-and-So's, who had been established three years in Park Lane, had to go wanting.

One thing must be said for Miss Thingamy. She really was an excellent dancer. Anyhow, dear Violet's brother, that nice young man in the Pinks, seemed to take as many turns with her as with that charming girl Gwendolen Childwick. She, too, was a *partie*.

But of course, rather "heavy cake." So that towards the end of a most enjoyable evening—dear Emily's evenings were always so enjoyable—rumours began to arise of jealous riding. From the purely dancing point of view Miss What-was-her-name could put poor Gwendolen to bed any old time—could fairly tuck her up, as it were, in her little cot. Really no comparison between the two. Trade, of course, both. But who minds trade these days? Besides, Celebrated Three Ply Flannelette is so much more distinguished than Hogs.

That fearful accent, my dear. Quite the wrong kind of American. What a pity that since the War there has been such a lowering of European standards. Don't you remember, my dear, when you and I first came over, what enormous trouble our parents took that *we* should do and say nothing to disgrace them? And even then it wasn't altogether easy, was it? Sad, my dear, to see how things have changed. But as I took the opportunity of saying privately to dear Emily, if that type of American does really get off with an old marquisate there is bound to be a slump in the more respectable English titles.

XXXIV

"LITTLE Puss, of course you will not touch the Canary. But there are other birds on the bough."

Lady Violet did not use these exact words, but that was Mame's astute interpretation of the light in her eye and the smile on her face. What she did say was: "Your dancing last night with my brother was admired. People were asking who you were." But more, far more, was implied by the point and the humour with which she made those statements.

It was the morning after the Clanborough House ball. Mame, at ease in an armchair after a late breakfast, had a pleasant feeling of success. She had passed a fairly stiff examination with flying colours. Her sponsor was proud of her. She had looked well, carried herself well, danced beautifully. Even Aunt Emily, who was *so* critical, had spoken of her "as an unaffected little thing."

"It is just on the cards that she may invite you to Scotland for a fortnight at the end of August. There's great fun at Dunkeldie every year. And any amount of competition to get there. But in the meantime, if one may offer a hint, you'll see that nobody spikes your

guns. Some of your American friends are out on the warpath."

"No friends of mine. Spiteful cats, mainly, and I don't seem to mind letting some of them know it."

"Well, I don't think I would if I were you. They can do you more harm than you can do them."

Mame saw the truth of that. "But they don't love me, these birds. And I'd just like to shoot them all on sight."

Lady Violet laughed at the fierceness. But she well understood her feelings. Certain distinguished members of the American colony were giving trouble. Du Rance was a name unknown in Chicago. It was unknown in Washington. It was unknown in New York.

"Make hay while the sun shines, my dear." That was the sum of Lady Violet's wisdom. It was a great stroke of luck being in with Aunt Emily. She was one of the few people who still really counted. But Pressure was being brought to bear. Miss Du Rance had not been presented. Her credentials had not been verified. Doubt had even been cast upon the wealth of Poppa.

The woman of the world let fall a hint that several *partis* were about, who in their way were not unattractive.

"You kinda think I ought to put myself in solid." Mame had a touch of that crude force which some people found so engaging and other people didn't.

"No saying when the luck may change. One can

never quite depend on Aunt Emily. She might be got at. Our friend Mrs. Creber Newsum is out for blood. I don't know what you've done to the lady, but from what one hears she's got quite an edge on her tomahawk."

"That old squaw!" said the contemptuous Mame. "I'm not afraid of her."

Lady Violet was inclined to reprove. Her experience was that it never did to underrate one's foes. If people were not well disposed towards one, it paid as a rule to be afraid of them.

Mame, nevertheless, was not afraid of Mrs. Creber Newsum.

"She carries weight now her husband has got his diplomatic leg up. And she's in with the Childwicks."

"Who are the Childwicks, any old way?" asked Mame injudiciously. She realised her break the instant she had been guilty of it.

The Childwicks were all right. Lady Violet made that statement with a perceptible change of voice. "Gwendolen Childwick is as good as engaged to Bill, you know. Strictly between ourselves, mother is a bit surprised the announcement hasn't been made already."

"A regular mother's boy, is he?" Mame audaciously observed.

"What mother says goes—with Bill. And he knows that she quite approves of Gwendolen."

"Don't *he* approve of her?" Mame was still more audacious.

Bill's sister laughed coolly. "Dear Gwendolen is

very nice and she is an heiress. And Pop and Mommer Childwick were well known at Washington long before they came over here."

"The right kind of American, I guess."

Mame's naïveté met with further reproof. "One only speaks, my child, of the wrong kind of American. The right kind is left to speak for itself. And the moment it speaks for itself it becomes the wrong kind —if I make myself clear?"

"You do and you don't," said the candid Mame. "But to come down to cases, I've got to keep my eyes skinned for the Childwick push."

"Among others. They are not your friends, exactly. I don't know why. And they have the ear of Aunt Emily, who, please don't forget, as far as the funny old English village of Mayfair is concerned, is the nearest card you hold at the moment to the ace of trumps. You may pick up others later, but my advice is to hold on at present with both paws to Aunt Emily."

Mame saw the force of that. "Do you think I ought to get a new dress for this party next month?"

"The heliotrope will do quite well. Gwympe has made it beautifully."

"And only charged half price, as we are giving her that write-up. So I can blow myself off to another if you think I ought to have one."

That was not at all necessary. It would be hard to improve on the heliotrope. But one further word of caution. Mame must be wise about Gwendolen. As far as Clanborough House was concerned she had it

in her to be dangerous. "So, as I say," the mentor concluded, "I hope you'll be wise about her."

"I will," Mame faithfully promised.

"And don't forget there are others." The face of the mentor was full of mystic meaning.

"I won't," promised Mame.

XXXV

MAME had received a sort of hint that one or two nice plums were in the matrimonial basket.

For some weeks to come she had every opportunity of judging how nice the plums in the basket really were. No matter where the ripe fruit clustered, there to be seen was *la belle Américaine*. Not that, strictly speaking, she took rank as "a looker." Really and truly she did not pretend to beauty. But she had a way with her. She had the charm of one not afraid to be herself. And that as much as anything was what people liked about her. She was not afraid to be herself. So many of her more sophisticated compatriots were shy of giving nature a chance.

Perhaps they hardly realised that what passes for aristocracy in England is essentially barbarous; it counts freedom and frankness and don't-care-a-damness as second only to dollars. Mame had her share of the first and was reputed to have more than her share of the second. Thus, to the annoyance of a coterie among her countrywomen, who were blessed with girls of their own, she was likely to cut rather more ice than their privately tutored-and-governessed, trained-to-the-minute offspring. She was such an Original, while they conformed to a type. Where they were all prunes and

prisms, little Miss Chicago was forcible and unexpected.

By the time Miss Du Rance had been seen at the Embassy on the evening of the Fourth of July and she had been seen again in the grounds of Buckingham Palace on the afternoon of the Fifth, the coterie began "to get the wind up." Was it really a fact that dear Emily had invited Miss Thingamy to Dunkeldie for the last week in August and the first week in September? If so, it was almost a scandal. Polly Childwick certainly thought so; likewise Marcella Creber Newsum. Moreover, they both agreed that it would be doing dear, simple-hearted Emily an act of Christian kindness to say so. And the more forcibly it was said the more kind and the more Christian the act would be.

Dunkeldie hung in the balance. If Mame could bring off that it would be a *coup*. Such was Lady Violet's considered opinion and she knew every blade of grass on the course.

Still, the remnant of the prehistoric Four Hundred, a sort of prætorian Old Guard, was mustering every ounce that it possessed in the way of "influence." Dunkeldie would be a bit too much, when people like those really nice Perkinses with a villa on the Lido and their eldest boy in the Blues were still out in the cold. Dear Emily was so conservative in some ways; and yet in others, like ordinary mortals, so apt to be taken in.

It was that wicked Violet who was really to blame.

She had an atrocious and ill-bred habit of pulling legs. One never quite knew how one stood with her. She seemed to have a down on certain people who were considerably richer than herself; she was very unconventional; and quite uncomfortably clever. Why she was running this Miss Du Rance nobody knew; but the opinion was growing that at the back of the mind of the freakish Violet was a desire to make Clanborough House look foolish.

Somebody ought to warn dear Emily. It was a Christian duty. Besides, if persons like Miss Du Rance were given the run of the garden what was the use of trying to remain exclusive? With the whole world topsy-turvy, people in the position of dear Emily could not be too careful.

Lady Violet had shrewdly diagnosed the state of the case. The Colony was arming itself, the Pilgrim Daughters were going out on the warpath. They could not afford to let this dangerous little feline have things all her own way. Even her dollars could not condone her. And the best and latest information was unable to say where and what those dollars were.

The Puss, it was clear, had nothing to give away. Let her bear in mind that she still had to walk delicately. Many vigilant hands were simply itching to cut her claws and to trim her fur. The odd thing was she did not appear to amuse her compatriots at all; whereas the natives of the island seemed to find her great fun. It was her dollars, of course. But then those who hail from the land where dollars grow are apt to be so much

less charmed by them than the poor and rather mercenary British.

Mame continued "to get around." The main reason, no doubt, was that her work made it necessary. But soon a certain ambition took root in her. According to the office calendar, There is a Tide. While she was about it, she would be wise to neglect no opportunity of putting herself in solid. Experience had taught her already that if you don't take the chances that offer, your luck has a nasty trick of back-firing. Yes, if opportunity arose it would be well to be in solid.

Henley was fun. So was Ascot. So was Hurlingham. So was Lord's. Perhaps Henley was the best fun of all. Somehow, honest Thames water seemed to take a bit of starch out of the folks. Then there were several jolly dances; and other functions, rather more formal, but still in their way pleasant.

Week by week Mame met the same crowd under slightly differing conditions. And even her sponsor owned that it was wonderful how she adjusted herself to circumstances. Under expert guidance she was now developing a sure instinct of her own. It soon began to make a real difference to her personality. Happily it didn't take out the "pep."

She was astonishingly quick at picking up ideas. And she was not content merely to pick them up; she had a faculty for putting them to new and entertaining uses. Lady Violet, for all her experience of two continents, had never seen anyone like her. She was a unique combination of demureness and daring. The

things she said and the way she said them were beyond the compass of ordinary mortals. If you admired her dollars they went; if you didn't admire her dollars these gems of thought rather "got the bird."

But dollars are fascinating things. In England a mere rumour of them appears to have glamour. Since the War they have been getting so scarce, except among the wrong people. Miss Du Rance might be in that inclusive category, but then she was so adaptable. Her nationality and her youth were immensely in her favour. Dear Percy and dear Algernon, of course, would have to marry somebody; there did not seem to be enough British money to go round; it was a bore, her not having been presented, but no doubt she could be on her marriage. And even if she had no friends in America, that was more than offset by being "in" with Clanborough House.

Lady Violet, in the meantime, scented the breeze and enjoyed her wicked self hugely. Like her father, that charming and distinguished man, she had a rather unconventional view of life. Certain pomposities and pretensions gave her an impish desire to prick them. She knew that when it came down to bedrock they were rooted in mere lucre. In spite of its airs and graces, so cleverly used as a screen for the vulgar truth, the British aristocracy, what was left of it, was the most mercenary institution on the face of the earth. She did not blame it in the least. Being a woman of the world she did not blame anything for anything just now. It was one hell of a scramble with the devil

hanging on to the hindmost. But if one had a sense of humour and kept one's eyes open, it was wonderful what fun was to be got out of the charming piggy-wiggies one saw in the dear old stye.

The Canary was sacred, of course. Dear Mother had kept up her end so bravely; and Gwendolen was a good and sensible girl, though a little dull. But the minor dicky birds, the Percies and the Algernons were fair game for an early rising Puss, who had had its little tail twisted pretty severely at one time or another. As good as gold she was too, but without a sou, except what she earned by her own wits.

Meanwhile, the battle raged. Lady Violet resolved that Mame should be invited to Scotland for the deer stalking. It would crown her success. Such pluck deserved recognition. Lady Violet had a strong dash of sportsmanship in her. She was all for the underdog; and the uncalled-for attitude of certain people had rather "got her goat." Live and let live was an excellent motto; in fact, it so happened that it was the motto of the Trehernes. She enjoyed nothing better than to salt the tails of the Marcella Creber Newsums of the earth and their British prototypes. Mame was doing harm to nobody, yet New York-on-Thames was determined to down her.

However, they would see. It was true that Aunt Emily seemed to be wavering. Eton v. Harrow was through. People were packing up and clearing off to Goodwood and then to Cowes for the yachting. Lady Violet obtained an invitation for her little friend aboard

the *Excelsior* with those comic people the Dunnings. Glorious beer. But in Britain these days there was great competition even for that. It was one of the key industries that had done very well in the War. She herself was going to spend five days aboard the *Excelsior,* if she was able to survive them. No doubt she would. New people were so much more amusing than the old. But she had rather made it a condition that she should be accompanied by her little friend.

Still, Cowes and the Dunnings were a mere side show. Scotland at the end of next month would be the joy wheel. And Aunt Emily seemed to be wavering. To Celimene's chagrin, Mame had not been included in the invitation she herself had already received. If it went phut, it would be one up to the other side.

A proper score for Mrs. Creber Newsum if Miss Du Rance was left out. Her friend and partner chivalrously felt she must be up and doing. In some ways it would suit the firm better for Mame to stay in town gathering news while Celimene was sunning herself on the moors, but that hardly seemed fair. Besides, their job could be carried on anywhere within reach of a telegraph office; and in that respect Dunkeldie was very well off.

Honest work and real grit had earned the reward of a jolly fortnight. Celimene was fully determined that Mame should have it. She was beginning to take a personal pride in the success against odds of this clever child. Besides, if little Miss Chicago was left out in the cold, there would be smiles.

The thing hung fire so long that it began to look as if the day was going against them. Mame herself inclined to think so. The Colony was very active; it was always trying to call her bluff. All through the summer she had managed to keep her chin above water, but she could not expect to go on like that forever. Soon or late, something was bound to happen.

There were several reasons why Mame's heart was set on an invitation to Dunkeldie; but one must not look for everything in this world. All the same it was a defeat. And the moral of it was, no doubt, that at last the tide had begun to turn.

XXXVI

COWES was very enjoyable. The *Excelsior* was a comfortable yacht. Its hospitality was lavish. Dunning *père* was perhaps inclined to set a value on himself; the same applied to Dunning *mère;* but Sidney Dunning, heir to half a million six per cent debentures, was well mannered and attentive. On the slightest provocation he showed a decided tendency to come along.

For some reason Lady Violet did not seem to warm to the Dunnings, although she managed to take money off them at bridge, a game in which Miss Du Rance had been recently initiated and for which she showed quite an aptitude. But in the matter of Sidney Dunning, the sponsor was inclined to think Mame might do worse. New money of course. Still. *Que voulez vous?* They lived in times when all money was new; the Bolshies of the earth, by no means confined to Russia, had seen to that. Sidney Dunning was really not so bad. Eton and Christ Church: a little comically so, dear lad! But if Miss Du Rance was giving her mind to such matters there could be no harm in Sidney Dunning. A *mère,* of course, was bent on a title; still in Celimene's opinion it was rather up to Mame.

Sidney Dunning would be an insurance anyway. He

was not the only dabchick on the water; there were others good and plenty; but his plumage was more richly feathered than theirs; and in the circumstances he would perhaps be safer. Half a million six per cent, high-class brewery debentures are nice things to have locked up in your husband's strong box when you have no money of your own. Still, a little impertinent all this of Celimene, was not it?

Not at all. Kind of Celimene to be so interested. But Mame felt she must take time to think over the matter. Some of the other birds on the water were such sweet ducks that it seemed a pity to grab at the nearest, merely because of its geographical situation.

XXXVII

AT the last moment, almost, came the much-desired invitation to Dunkeldie. Lady Violet having heard that Mabel, her recently married sister, had decided not to go north this year, although expected to do so as usual, took the news in person to the ducal yacht as soon as it entered the harbour. As the astute Violet foresaw, Aunt Emily felt herself to be in rather a hat. It was a bit late in the day. Whoever filled the vacancy would do so now as an obvious substitute. Nobody likes to be that, as her niece was careful to point out. But her clever little American friend who was seeing as much of Britain as she could in the shortest possible time was likely to have no feelings of that kind. And everybody found her such fun!

It was always Aunt Emily's instinct to take the line of least resistance, particularly where the enterprising Violet was concerned. Dear Violet had her peculiarities, but she was a general favourite. She was so vivacious, so modern, so good-natured. You couldn't help liking Violet.

On this occasion Violet did not disdain a tactical *coup*. While Aunt Emily wavered she presented a kind of ultimatum. She had taken it so much for granted that Miss Du Rance would be included in the invitation

to Dunkeldie, that she was afraid she could not go north without her little friend. This rather "put it up" to Aunt Emily. But as the clever niece surmised, her own position with Clanborough House was strong enough "to try it on."

Aunt Emily had really no very strong feelings in the matter, even if some of her friends appeared to have. There was no harm in the little American beyond the fact, as one of the most influential of her countrywomen had quaintly expressed it, "she was as common as pig tracks." But as the unconventional Violet pointed out, it all came down to whether one cared for a little garlic in the salad. Most people, nowadays, liked a dash of pungency. Even the most fastidious were in favour of a touch of spice in the social dish. There was no harm in Miss Du Rance. Her only crime, even in the eyes of her critics, was that she was so very amusing. She would certainly add to the gaiety of Dunkeldie and that was all that mattered.

Face to face with dear Violet, Aunt Emily did not take long to yield. Of late years this clever niece had been the life and soul of the party; her absence would now make a gap that nothing could fill. Besides, in some ways Miss Du Rance was the obvious solution. If she didn't really mind being asked at such short notice she would be made very welcome at Dunkeldie.

The invitation was really obtained by *force majeure*. But none the less it came in its way as a triumph. Yet it was not so much a triumph for Miss Du Rance as for her friend and sponsor. Mame was still rather

unsophisticated. Certain social nuances meant less to her than to Celimene. One set of "the folks" was much like another; so long as she could keep getting about to this function and that, she would not worry. But Lady Violet had made her protégée's cause so much her own that she felt she could hardly afford to have her publicly slighted.

Odd, was it not, that dear Violet should be so determined to run the funny little American? But Violet was like that. She was always "running" someone. And as a rule the someone was more or less impossible. One year it was a Russian dancer, another a cubist painter, or a Polish musician. She seemed to take up queer people and develop a passion for them as others did for pekes or bulldogs or chows or angoras. Dear Violet's trouble was too many brains. Her vein of freakishness sought expression in the freakishness of the world at large.

Dunkeldie, as usual, was a huge success. The weather was perfect; the sport excellent. But the sport hardly mattered so much, even if it were heresy to say so, as in less attractive places. It was the people who gathered there who counted most. Year by year they came to Dunkeldie to have a good time. Along with some of the finest shots in the kingdom were others who, if they did not add to the prowess of the field, were highly accomplished in the arts and the graces of life.

For Mame this was a fresh phase of existence. Her few days at Cowes aboard the *Excelsior* had done some-

thing to prepare her for the freedom of the moors; but Dunkeldie itself, gorgeously set in the lee of the Grampians, was something new. Dunkeldie was beyond her dreams. On the August evening she motored with Lady Violet from the train at Inverauchty, which was fifteen miles away and the nearest railway station, and saw the great house of stone nestling against a background of mountain and forest and the heather billowing around it, she gave a little gasp. In rich and mysterious beauty it was a place of faëry. She had read of such homes, she had seen them pictured on the screen, but even in her most fanciful moments she hardly expected to find them in her life good and real.

When they wound uphill, in rather precipitous half circles, that last astonishing mile to the proud keep of Dunkeldie, and drew up in the golden light before the low lintel of the main entrance to the Castle, the first person to welcome them was Bill. He stood in the doorway looking superbly handsome in a sporran and kilt. The place itself was a thing of sheer beauty and somehow Bill matched it.

At the sight of him Mame's heart began to dance. He sent a loud who-whoop echoing among the angles of the stone walls and again danced her heart. And when he flung open the door of their car, before the douce footman could get down from his box, or another of his like could spring out from the portico, her blood thrilled. There seemed to be magic in the air.

From the very hour of her arrival this feeling of magic in the air was upon Mame. And all the wonder-

ful days she was at Dunkeldie it never left her. The house itself was an embodied tradition. Its glamour was haunted by the spirit of place. That ancient roof-tree held strange secrets; and nothing so far in Mame's life had quite prepared her for them.

The train had reached Inverauchty an hour and a quarter late, as the trains in that part of the world had a way of doing. Dinner was due in twenty minutes. Therefore it was a bit of a scurry to change. Bill's only accomplishment, at least to which he owned, although other people rated him a pretty useful shot and a fairly straight rider to hounds, was that he could "dress" in ten minutes; but neither his sister nor Miss Du Rance, even with Davis to help them, was quite up to that. Still in a quarter of an hour Celimene was looking her gay and cool and distinguished self in an old and plain black gown. It took Mame longer than that to don a frock rather more pictorial; but with Davis "to do her up," she was looking presentable if not quite as Chick as she could have desired by the time dinner was announced.

The guests, to the number of a round twenty, assembled in the armoury, a sort of large hall whose ancient usage had been agreeably softened by modern comfort. It sounded dull, dismal, draughty, dour; as a fact it was quite cosy; and it had the advantage of being cool in summer, warm in winter. This evening at the end of August, its temperature was a happy medium. Whatever chill there was in it, due to the lengthening of the shadows around the mullioned win-

dows, was merged in a general atmosphere of cheery good will.

Even Uncle John and Aunt Emily, whose long suit was not exactly cheeriness, at any rate of a wildly festive kind, made a heroic effort this evening to assume that virtue. Nothing could have exceeded the kindness of their welcome. If they did not pretend to intellectual brilliance, and they had to be on their guard lest a sense of dignity was a little overdone, they were very sensible, well-meaning people; and if you were invited to their board they laid themselves out to see that you had a good time.

Mame soon felt at home. The day's journey had been long and tedious, but with the resiliency of youth she was able thoroughly to enjoy her dinner. Bill sat one side of her and a very distinguished politician who knew America and had a keen appreciation of all things American, sat the other. Conversation flowed. Good stories crossed the dinner table. A piper came skirling round the chairs of the guests. Wine, wit and good fellowship circulated freely. Mame surrendered to the feeling that this was life.

She took her sponsor's advice and went to bed early and in that wonderful highland air slept as never before unless it was in the early days on the farm after many hours of drudgery. It was a dreamless and renewing sleep and was only terminated when a sonsy lassie set some tea and bread and butter by the side of her bed, unbolted the large shutters and let in the sun.

Five minutes later when Mame sprang out of bed

and gazed through the window upon the glory of the scene, the first object to catch her eye was a young man on the fair green below. He was diligently coaxing a small ball into an invisible hole by means of an odd piece of iron. Mame's education, as yet, had not included the game of golf. But she knew it when she saw it. And as she stood watching this player she felt the time had come to develop her knowledge of a science peculiarly Scottish.

The player was Bill. There was no escaping him. Early and late he seemed to be always in the centre of the picture. But why should one wish to escape him? Who could be fairer to look upon? A sight for sair eyne, as these quaint Scots said, this tall, brown, upstanding young fellow.

By the time Mame was through the business of dressing, she had made up her mind to repair one more gap in her education. She must learn to play golf. And Bill it should be to give her a first lesson. A believer in the definite object, and a mark to aim at in the life of each day, she was as confirmed a go-getter in the Scotch highlands as on Broadway or in the Strand.

Quickly she swallowed her porridge and bacon and sought the diligent Bill. He was still putting. In his way he also was a go-getter. For the time being, at any rate, he was the slave of ambition. Twelve was his present handicap, yet he saw no reason why concentration on the short game should not soon reduce it to a more seemly nine.

With the genial forthcomingness that Mame con-

sidered to be not the least of Bill's merits, he made his ambition known to her as soon as she came upon the scene. And she, with the engaging frankness which in his eyes was so attractive, promptly confided her own resolve. No hour like the present, declared Bill. The stalkers would not seek the hills before noon. Plenty of time for a lesson.

"I'll borrow a club off Gwendolen Childwick. Mine are a bit heavy for you. Then I'll show you the swing. In this game the swing is everything; and it's jolly difficult."

Mame was sure that it was. With a merry eye she watched Simplicitas stroll away in quest of Gwendolen Childwick's bag. Gwendolen was a "scratch" player. Her bag was simply bulging with drivers and brassies, not to mention irons and spoons.

If Bill was not, broadly speaking, one of nature's most solid chunks of wisdom, that is to say he was a most deliciously tactless young man, he was yet brimming over with other qualities. And these greatly commended themselves to Mame. She broke into a low carol of pure joy when the sweet boob returned in about five minutes with Miss Childwick's second-best driver.

"Didn't seem very keen on lending it, for some reason." He proceeded to lock Mame's fingers round the leather in the Vardon grip. "Worst of these classic gowfers is they are so fearfully particular about their clubs. But we can't possibly do this one any harm, can we?"

Mame was sure they could not.

They spent a profitable hour. This pretty and clever Miss Du Rance was a very apt pupil. Bill was convinced the root of the matter was in her. These Americans had a wonderful faculty for picking up games. And their minds were so fresh and so cute. Most amusing che-ild he had met in a month of Sundays. The things she said and the way she said them! Yet learning, mark you, to swing that bally old club better and better all the time.

"You'll make a player," was Bill's pronouncement at the end of the lesson. "If you stick to it."

Rejoined little Miss Chicago: "I'll stick to it like a sick kitten to a warm brick. Once I take a thing up I just hold on by my teeth. Do you think you can give me another lesson to-morrow, at the same time and the same place?"

"I'll be delighted." And Simplicitas looked as if he meant it.

XXXVIII

THE next morning Mame received her second lesson in the art of golf. On this occasion the reluctant Gwendolen's mashie was commandeered. As the amount of "pretty" at the edge of the putting green was strictly limited—the whole thing was no part of a *bona fide* course, but a makeshift affair—Bill thought, dear fellow, that Miss Du Rance had better start with the serious business of "the short approach."

Her faculty for the short approach was marvellous. Physical power was not required. Mental concentration it was that did the trick. You kept your eye on the ball, you sort of coaxed it right up to the hole, then you took a putter and there you were. Just as easy as falling off the Monument, as Miss Du Rance drolly remarked.

Bill took so much interest in the development of her latent skill that a morning lesson of at least one hour became a permanent daily feature. In seven days she had seven lessons. And she was such a sport, and so keen to learn, and Bill took such a pride in her progress and she was altogether so jolly that before half the period was through he was calling her Mame. This course of lessons was quite the most thriving study he had ever undertaken.

Little Miss Chicago's success was not confined to golf. After dinner there was generally music of one kind or another. Sometimes, if the day's sport had not been too strenuous, there was dancing for the younger guests. Mame's intelligence and lightness of foot made her an admirable pupil for several gentlemen wise in the native arts. Sometimes there were foxtrots to the strains of the victrola. In these Miss Du Rance needed no instruction. Nay, she was in a position to impart it. And there was competition to receive the same.

When the day's stalk on the purple hills had been too fatiguing, as was sometimes the case, for even the junior sportsmen to take the floor after dinner, a piano was brought into use and comic songs were sung. Natural comedians were of the party. Bill was one. He could imitate certain music-hall stars to the life. Then there was a young chap in the Foreign Office who was so giftedly impecunious that he was seriously considering the question of exchanging a career in diplomacy which means so little in the way of lucre, for a contract with an Anglo-American syndicate to do a single on the big time. He could conjure and sing and play the fool "like old boots." And he was so popular in consequence that he was asked to half the great houses in the kingdom.

After all was said and done, however, the biggest success in this kind was reserved for little Miss Chicago. That was the name she went by with everybody. Somehow the title seemed to fit her. Even stately Uncle

John and statelier Aunt Emily, striving always for a sense of humour, that one real asset of which they had nothing to spare, alluded to her as little Miss Chicago. It was she who made the biggest hit of all.

As Lady Violet said, it was when the minx sat down to the piano that she really got away with it. Her great song, which she had heard in one of the few successful New York revues that had not yet reached London, was called "I'm the Beautest Little Cutie in the Burg of Baltimore." And she sang it with such conviction and spirit and drollery that "the folks" seemed never to tire of listening. The music was topping and the words had a swing; while Miss Du Rance's rendering of this gem of humour was such that, had it not been for Pop's dollars, his reputed heiress might have turned to "the halls" as a means of livelihood.

Indeed, Mame had the conviction of that within her in the Cowbarn days. She had quite a reputation at the homely parties and sing songs of that small town. And when Elmer P. had crystallised the local feeling in the words, "Mame Durrance is a kind of natural droll," that lady had spent a whole fortnight gravely considering whether she could not make good in vaudeville.

It was gratifying to know that the early Cowbarn success could be repeated in the highlands of Scotland. To be sure, the audience was much more easily pleased. It appeared to consider her lightest word funny. Even her way of just sitting down to the piano and picking

out the notes with one finger seemed to give some of them fits.

Strange to say, however, among an audience which was so sympathetic, were one or two who seemed to be left quite cold by "The Beautest Little Cutie" and that other Broadway gem, which became only slightly less popular, "How's Tricks?" These critics belonged, oddly enough, to Miss Du Rance's own sex, and still more oddly, considering the great and deserved reputation for humour of the American people, they belonged, or had once belonged, at least their forebears had, to that up-and-coming nation.

For instance, there was that Miss Childwick—Gwendolen she was called. If ever there was one, that was a hard girl. She seemed to have no use at all for the clever and lively Miss Du Rance. Indeed, Mame, whose power of ear was so acute, overheard her saying to a sister compatriot, Mrs. Prance Horton, a social leader who had been recently imported from over the water, "that privately she considered that style of singing rather vulgar." And Mrs. Prance Horton, whose home town was Boston, quite agreed with her.

It was not so much what Miss Childwick said, it was the way she said it. She was always trying to put one over on Mame, or what came to the same thing, Mame thought she was. There was a certain amount of provocation, no doubt. All the world knew it was only a question of time for the fair Gwendolen's engagement to Bill to be announced. Why it had not yet been made public and the day fixed, even Bill's sister, who

was so informed upon every subject, was at a loss to understand.

Towards the end of the first week Miss Childwick's attitude to "the little American"—as though she were not American herself, dear soul!—grew so marked in Mame's sight, that she felt it would not take much for her to begin seeing red. The airs of Miss Three Ply Flannelette grew so insufferable that Mame was inclined seriously to ask herself the question whether she ought to take them lying down.

Cet animal est très méchant. Quand on l'attaque, il se dèfend. Having regard to what happened the problem arises: Was it really necessary for Miss Du Rance to defend herself in the way that she did? Opinions may differ. Yet few will deny that only a little fool would have missed such a chance.

It was after a week of highland magic that Mame felt the fierce impact of poetry and romance. Hitherto in her twenty-two years of existence precious little of those elements had come her way. But life at Dunkeldie was so different from any she had known. This was a new kingdom. And in the heart of it was the queer thing that makes some guys ramp and rage with rapture and those more worldly shrug and smile and shake their polls.

XXXIX

THINGS went from bad to worse between Mame and Miss Childwick. The Three Ply Lady had a clever and spiteful tongue under a proud reserve of manner, a discovery made by Miss Du Rance when quite by accident she overheard her small self being dissected by certain members of the house party.

"Violet will soon tire of her."

Tire of whom? That was the question for Mame, as those significant words stole on her keen ears. This conversation followed an enjoyable *al fresco* luncheon on the hillside. The guns had gone on while the ladies rested a little from the heat of the day. Mame had got her back to a shady fir which concealed her effectively and was composing herself for a siesta when she caught those words proceeding from the bole of an adjacent tree.

"She reminds me of an opossum." It was the aristocratic voice of Mrs. Prance Horton, whose first name was Gloria. "Don't you know, one of those queer little animals who live in the gum trees of the South. They can be taught all sorts of monkey tricks, but are never really tame. It seems to me that dear Violet is teaching this opossum all sorts of tricks, but I don't think she'll be amused with her long."

"Why don't you?" That was the voice of Miss Childwick. It sounded interested and alert.

"A little too dangerous, my dear. Besides, dear Violet soon tires of her toys. Don't you remember the young cubist she ran and the Russian pianiste and the Carmanian princess who turned out to be a well-known impropriety? She gives all her toys their heads, for a time, then she drops them and they are never heard of again."

"But as this girl is so rich—"

"That is the point. Is she so rich? Nobody has heard of her father. Marcella Newsum doubts whether she has any money at all."

"Violet says—"

"—she is the richest thing that ever happened. And knowing our Violet, that may mean one thing or it may mean another. But I am none the less convinced that if this Miss Thingamy, whoever she may be, is half as cute as she looks, she'll lose no time in feathering her little nest."

"Well, I do think it is high time that Violet shed her."

"I quite agree. And from what one gathers, Violet herself is beginning to think so too. She is afraid the little monkey may get up to some mischief."

"That would not be at all surprising." Very dry sounded the voice of Gwendolen Childwick, as she got up with her friend and moved on.

Mame stayed where she was. Grave reflections mingled now with the desire for a gentle siesta. The con-

versation she had overheard was wounding and it was disquieting. In the last few days a suspicion had begun to dawn upon her of a change in Lady Violet's attitude. Her friend was not quite so cordial or so light-hearted as she had been.

Lady Violet was known to be capricious. She had proved so in the first place, by taking up on sight a nameless little American newspaper girl. And if she smelt danger, as no doubt she did, Mame Du Rance might wake one morning and find herself "in the discard."

As Mame tramped slowly back through the heather with the other ladies towards the proud keep of Dunkeldie her mind was working with the vigour of a small dynamo. She must come down to cases. There was a Tide. By hook or by crook these women meant to down her. Moreover, they looked like doing it.

The stalkers made a day of it. Early to bed was the order. Even Bill was tired out. But the morrow was spent in the less strenuous pursuit of a few stray grouse. And after dinner the younger sportsmen being game for a hop, the whole party except one or two of the seniors, who were incorrigible bridge players, adjourned to the ballroom. The victrola was brought into use. And after Mame had danced twice with Bill, who had certainly improved since their first essay at the Orient Dance Club, she suddenly began to realise that the time was now.

For one thing it was an evening of warm splendour. The harvesters' moon was near its zenith. When in

the middle of the dance the massive windows of the ballroom were thrown open, the fair scene beyond of woodland, lake and fell looked gloriously inviting.

As Mame stood resting from her labours, with Bill by her side, and with the wary eyes of at least one other lady upon them, she sighed with a certain wistfulness. "That water with the moon on it looks good to me."

"It is good." In the last week or two Bill had grown rather quicker in the uptake.

"I wish I could row as well as you can." Mame was still wistful. Bill was a "wet bob" and already he had demonstrated to Miss Du Rance the worth of his early training. "Any fool can." Yet he must have known that any fool could not.

"Such a night as it is," sighed Mame. "I never saw a moon that size."

Bill, poor loon, had never seen a moon that size either.

"Just dandy how those beams strike the water." Who was the guy in the office calendar who got away with

> The stag at eve had drunk his fill,
> Where danced the moon on Monan's rill?

Old man Burns, wasn't it? Or was it old man Scott? Under the magic spell of the moon on the water, Mame moved a little nearer. "Say, bo," she whispered in the tone that always amused him, yet with a little shiver of feeling in it that in the trancéd ear of Bill was

something more than merely amusing, "that little rill out there *does* look good to me."

The mobility of Bill's mind was still nothing remarkable, but it sufficed. "If you'll put on a cloak or something, we might go and see if we can find that boat we had the other day."

"That'll be bully," sighed Mame softly to the moon.

XL

SHE went and got her cloak. Bill was waiting for her below in the hall. They passed out through a side door of the Castle, across the putting green, along a little sidepath to a wicket. Just beyond the wicket was the lake. And by its marge was moored a sort of coracle.

The moon was so much their friend that they had no difficulty in finding this skiff. Getting aboard, however, was not quite such a simple business. She was but a cockleshell of a craft which had to be nicely trimmed to accommodate two. But Mame, sure-footed as a cat, instinctively disposed herself in the right spot. Bill untied the boat and took the oars and then began their odyssey.

In the centre of the lake, which although deep in places was not very wide, was a tiny isle. There was room for Miranda and Ferdinand upon it, for a few birds and a few rushes and a few trees and for not much else. But in the moonlight it shone with the pale magic of faëry. Here, sure, was the local habitation of romance. The lure of that shadow-and-tide-haunted spot was irresistible. Bill began to witch the night with oarmanship; and in five minutes or less the coracle had touched at Prospero's enchanted island.

As they floated gently through the veil of the trees, while the water lapped musically and one startled bird rose eerily with a loud whir, Mame had the happy illusion that she was a classic heroine. This is how those romantic janes must have felt in old days when those poetic guys wrote sonnets to their eyebrows.

Plying the oars with uncommon skill this guy appeared too much of a man to be a poetry addict. He was a regular fellow of the twentieth century; a practical modern with all the latest improvements. There was nothing highfalutin about him. Yet even he, as seen by the light of that wonderful moon, had rather the air of a venturer in strange places.

"Say, listen, bo, this seems pretty good to me." Hardly more than a whisper those half comic words, yet full of feeling, full of comradeship, full of whimsicality. Bill chuckled softly. The charming minx had expressed his own idea of the subject. Yes, it was pretty good. There was magic in the water, in the trees, in the very air and texture of this wonderful night. He had never lived such moments. This highland country with the power of the moon upon it sort of carried one beyond oneself.

What a topping little girl! So different from the others. Not that they were not good and jolly in their way. In the sight of Bill all girls were good and jolly; but some, of course, had more vim and sparkle, more originality, more zip. Yes, a good girl. The way that old moon picked out the curve of her chin and the way the blue-green water was reflected in her rather

queer but alluring eyes gave one a corking feeling of living the big, glad life.

Bill's ambition, at that moment, was to take her in his arms and kiss her. But an unwary movement must overturn them sure. He must wait until he could beach the skiff and dispose of the oars.

Coasting around they entered a small shallow cove, where the tree-laden banks came down gently to the water's edge. This was the spot. Bill ran the boat on to a tiny strand. Yet by occult means the dark purpose in the mind of Ferdinand was already communicated to the heart of Miranda.

Just as he was about to lay aside his oars, she rose like a bird and flew ashore. It was now a case of come and find me. Heedless of her slippers she sprang up a dry grassy knoll with Bill in quick pursuit. She flitted behind a tree and then another and then another. The pursuit was hot but she was agile. Through heather and ferns she flew. As she passed from tree to tree, a moonlit wraith in her white cloak, she was like a naiad, an incarnation of elfin laughter and mirth.

Bill was a good trier, but this woodland sprite took a lot of catching. He was one of those hefty fellows whom nature had not designed for mobility. Something better, however, than mere speed was his. He was a stayer. Even if not fleet of foot he took a lot of shaking off once he had hit the trail.

She darted like a squirrel from tree to tree. But Bill the relentless was always there. Presently she would tire, but no tiring for him this side the rising of

the sun. Already she was slowing down. Yard by yard he was gaining. There was only one tree between them now. There was less than a tree; there was less than half a tree.

Now, you nymph! She was as slender in his arms as a young willow. But her motions were very wild and quick. The bright red life was tingling in every electric inch of her. It was wonderful what force and liveliness she had. This was a girl. A sweet little mouth. She fought a bit, she kicked him on the shin, but it was not the sort of kick that meant anything.

Blown and tossed, yet hooting with a laughter that shocked the island's other inhabitants, they came presently to earth on the dry bank above the pellucid water. But Ferdinand held Miranda close. Not a chance for her to slip from his arms and elude him again.

The witch seemed to have no especial desire for more feats of the kind. That strong and manly arm was far too good to have around one. And there was such a slender hope of getting free. One half-hearted attempt was the sum of all her struggles.

What was that plopping in the water? A fish? Some funny old bird? Was that a coney? What a moon it was! How weird and yet how grand it made the Castle look. To think that pile of stones had stood just so in the time of Robert the Bruce.

Had Bill read any of the romances of old man Scott?

Yes, he seemed to remember having read Robinson Crusoe. That was mainly about an island, wasn't it? Then there was Don Quixote. Those were the only

works he had read of Sir Walter Scott. Personally he always felt that real life was so much better than simply reading about it . . . .

She had a most kissable mouth.

"Tell me, Puss, do you think you could stick me for always?"

The Simplicitas question seemed to jump so abruptly upon her that Mame was caught unawares.

It was not that she hadn't seen it coming. Sooner or later it was bound to arise. But she hadn't expected the boob to take off quite so soon. Here he was fairly plopping into her pocket, without giving her a chance of making adequate preparation to receive him.

Even at Cowbarn, Iowa, where the roughneck abounds, Bill's form would have been rated a trifle crude. The question had been half invited, yet certainly she would like to have had a little more in the way of notice. Still there it was. No parrying, no parleying, no evading. Excited she was, but she must pull her fool self together; she must bring her wits into play. This was a matter for now.

Never had she felt so near complete happiness. A big moment. The romance of the circumstances made her feel a wee bit delirious; the pressure of life in her veins was terrific. A spell was in the trees and the mountains; on the heather; on the keep of Dunkeldie; on the moon-haunted lake. Magic had got into her blood.

She must take a pull on herself, she must look around. This was a powerful question. There were many im-

plications. But why bother her head about them, even if at this moment she was capable of doing so, which beyond a doubt she was not.

"Sorry to rush my fences like this." The voice, deep and level, was very close to her ear. "But we are just made for one another. And I mean to have you."

"Don't be too sure of that, honey." That was the answer she meant to give. Had she not been carried so completely away by the enchantments of that old and wicked moon, it would have been given beyond a doubt. But just now she was not able to do as she liked; that was to say, being half off your balance simply reft you of the power of doing what you didn't like. It would go to her heart to throw away this golden chance. Empire over oneself would be needed for that. Besides, the trees of the island whispered to her, Mame Durrance, what a fool puss you'll sure be if you do.

XLI

THE best of times come to an end. And they have a trick of coming to an end abruptly. Such was Mame's thought, when on the morning of the thirteenth day of Dunkeldie, or to be a little more precise, on the morning after the visit to Prospero's magic island, there came a knock on her bedroom door, while she was sewing lace on a camisole. Lady Violet entered.

She was a bearer of ill tidings. "We must pack up to-morrow."

Mame's countenance fell. She had been cherishing a hope that her clever friend would be able to wangle at least one week more. It was the good life; everything was going swimmingly; this was the first suggestion that it was about to end so soon.

"Won't your Aunt Emily stand for us a bit longer?" Mame was inclined to question the fates.

"It isn't altogether that. Aunt Emily would like us to stay on, but there's bread and butter to consider, you know."

Ruefully Mame supposed there was. Still the firm seemed to be carrying on pretty well at Dunkeldie. And their locum tenens, one Gerty Smith, was diligent and trustworthy.

"But aren't we rather taking chances? There's New

York to think of now. It won't do to be too much behind with our information."

"We're not so behind as all that. There's nothing much doing in London, and what there is Gerty Smith can attend to. Seems to me an extra seven days here isn't going to matter."

Disappointment was in Mame's tone and there was no attempt to conceal it. She had counted on another magic week. But Celimene was adamant.

"There's that new play on Monday at the St. James's, also one on Tuesday at the Shaftesbury."

"Gerty can fix those."

"Unfortunately they are both American pieces. And New York won't like it if we don't give of our best."

"Shucks!" protested Mame. "Gerty can mug up a notice as slick as we can. If you tell her just what to say beforehand—uproarious welcome, speeches before the curtain and all the rest of the dope—New York'll never know the difference."

"I don't quite agree." Celimene's voice had grown particularly calm and quiet.

Once before and once only had Mame heard that voice. On that occasion it was the prelude to trouble. She looked shrewdly at her mentor. And what she saw gave her pause.

The gay and laughing eyes had hardened. They were still gay and laughing, but behind them was an elusive something Mame did not like. Her keen perception had noted for some days past a subtle change in the manner of Bill's sister. The thought had already

crossed Mame's mind that those prize cats had been getting at the friend to whom she owed so much.

"Davis will give you a hand with your packing." The tone, light and gentle as it was, sounded absolutely final. "To-morrow morning we must catch the ten o'clock from Inverauchty."

There was nothing to be done. Short of open defiance, to which Mame was sorely tempted, and yet was wise enough not to yield, no alternative was left.

Bill was bitterly disappointed when he heard the bad news. He had taken it for granted that Mame was staying on. But in his way he was a philosopher.

"I'll be in London about ten days from now. And then—and then we'll roll along to Cartier's and choose a ring."

Mame's eyes shone. It was the tangible evidence of her triumph and of her happiness. Yes, there was magic in the air of Dunkeldie. Life might be a long round of daily disappointment, but back of everything was always the Big Stuff, if only one had the luck and the pluck to be able to pull it.

"Have you told Violet?" She was able to ask that serious question in spite of a tumultuous heart. There was reason to suppose that he had.

"Not yet. I'll tell my mother first, if you don't mind. No need to set tongues wagging too soon. You can tell Vi when you like, of course; but people when they get publicly engaged look and feel such fools, don't they?"

Mame supposed they did. And her triumph would

keep. The announcement, when it came, would be rather like exploding a bomb in the new world she had entered. Gwendolen Childwick would be furious. So would the other furry ones. And Violet certainly was not going to like it.

How could she? Mame did not disguise from herself that she was worried by the thought of the friend to whom she owed so much. An uncomfortable feeling overtook her. To have caught this much-cherished bird was perilously akin to ingratitude.

Disappointing as it was to cut short the time of one's life at Dunkeldie, out of regard for another's caprice, London, on Mame's return, did not seem so bad. She had found it a funny old burg and in some respects an overrated one; yet it is the sort of place to which most people don't mind going back once in a while. There is usually something doing in London in the early fall.

To begin with, there was the question of daily bread. And Mame's heart was really in her job. She had made good in the highlands; yet one glamorous hour, no matter how crowded and glorious, cannot undo the mental habits of a lifetime. She was now the bride-elect of a marquis, but first and foremost she remained a go-getter. It gave her a wonderful thrill to receive every morning a rather illiterate-looking letter with a Scotch postmark; but it was still her nature to be up and coming.

She liked the true London-and-New York sort of feeling of being a busy young bee; of doing the work of the hive. There was a sense of power in gathering

news first hand; of putting it in tabloid form; of sending it over the wires of divers oceans and continents. She had lived magic hours. But wise folks don't put their trust in magic. London and the daily round were a useful antidote.

Life had suddenly grown big and rich and beautiful. All the same it was not without its peril. Mame had a keen desire to confide the great secret to her housemate and partner. Yet her courage was not equal to the task. She could not help thinking, from her friend's perceptible change of attitude, that she must know what was in the air. Arid silence upon the subject of Bill lent colour to this theory. Once or twice, greatly daring, Mame had broached it stealthily, in the hope of finding out how the land lay. But on each occasion Lady Violet hastened to talk of something else.

The friendship, which to Mame had always been delightful, seemed to wear quite thin in the fortnight which elapsed before Bill, true to his promise, was again in London. An ever-growing coolness was discernible in his sister. Conscience may have played its part in the matter; yet there was no disguising that icicles were around. Mame was not unheedful. She could not forget the recent past; she could not forget how much she owed to a true friend. Bill was Bill; he was just lovely; but without the sanction of his family it might be difficult for their happiness to be really complete.

The young man had not been home ten hours from Scotland when he rang up Mame in Half Moon Street.

She must be at the Berkeley or the Ritz, whichever she preferred, at a quarter past one; they would have a bit of lunch and then toddle round into Bond Street and choose the ring.

How good to hear that gay voice on the phone. What a rare power he had of keying one up. He was so responsive. Everything one said, the most commonplace remarks, seemed to tickle his sense of humour.

"The Ritz, a quarter after one, honey. I'll be around."

At twelve Mame downed tools.

"I've got to go out to lunch," she announced casually. "So I guess I'll go and doll up a bit."

"Right-o." Celimene was curt. She had already said that she was lunching out. For that matter she had only once lunched at the Ladies Imperium since the return from Scotland; so that the old friendly habit of the partnership of reserving a table near the window with a view of the Green Park no longer held.

Did Violet know what was in the wind? She was marvellous at reading signs. With all her casualness and her rather aristocratic viewpoint, which was such a handicap to getting money, she was just as clever as she could stick. Anyhow, she would have to be told soon. And there sure would be a dandy fuss.

Each time Mame ventured a glance at Celimene, the less she fancied the cut of her distinguished jib.

XLII

BILL looked a peach in his Guards' tie, when at a quarter past one he was discovered among the ferns at the Ritz. Mame had no wish to be unduly set up with herself; nay she was too wise ever to be so, but there was a happy sense which informed her that she was some advertisement for the new dress-maker Gwympe. Right up to the knocker. Right up to the nines. Everything just so. Since she had gone to live at Half Moon Street she had developed taste in clothes. The neat coat frock of navy blue gabardine was the last word in style; the same applied to the dinky little hat of black velvet.

A good world, thought Mame, and Bill thought so too, as they ate a delicate but expensive luncheon. And then at their leisure they crossed the road and sauntered down a famous street as far as a famous jeweller's, where the ring was duly chosen. Being a marquis, Bill was rather a believer in doing things well. The ring was therefore no half-and-half affair, but the last cry of fashion, wonderfully devised of small pearls and diamonds. It cost, no doubt, a pretty figure. What the exact sum was remained a secret between Bill and the jeweller; and there was no happier girl than Mame in the whole of London, when with that token glitter-

ing on her finger she and her affianced sought again the air of Bond Street.

They strolled down Piccadilly. In their glossy elegance, surmounted by faces of healthy Scottish tan, they were decidedly good to look at. Many sympathetic glances were directed upon them by the passers-by. Some people consider that taking one day with another there is a greater pressure of really good-looking people to the square yard in that gentle declivity which ends at Hyde Park Corner than in any stretch of equal length on the wide earth. The type of beauty there represented is so honest, so upstanding, so cheerfully simple yet so immaculately dressed. Bill and his young lady did no dishonour to Piccadilly north side; and had they had eyes for aught but each other they might have learned how much they were admired.

In point of fact Mame did happen to catch the eye of one little girl remarkably like herself of a few short months ago, who with her satchel containing heaven knew what secret ambitions, was on her way back to her work. She was a resolute and plucky bit of a thing, withal a little peaked and pale, a little tired and a little bored; and there was more than mere admiration in the glance which envisaged Mame, her clothes, and her escort. There was a wistful envy.

Yes, honey, thought Mame complacently, you do well to envy me. Just now I am the happiest girl in London. It all seems too good to be true. I feel sure there must be a catch in it somewhere. But the glow of feeling continued as far as the Park gates, where they turned

in, and the day being wonderfully bright and mild, as it often is in England towards the middle of September, they sat on garden chairs for two solid hours at a point equi-distant between the Achilles Statue and Knightsbridge Barracks where the Pinks were now in residence.

Those two hours of prattling to Bill and of Bill prattling to her Mame never forgot. Her sense of everything seemed to grow richer and deeper. Wasn't it Hamlet or some other wise guy who had put it over in the office calendar that heaven and earth held more things than he dreamed of? That was exactly how Mame felt now. She could hardly believe that she herself was she. Was this the little hick who a year ago had hardly been ten miles away from Cowbarn, Iowa, in all her young life? Was this the little mucker New York had laughed at? She was far too practical to believe in fairies, but she could not deny the feeling that a spell was at work.

Bill was charming to sit by and talk to. He made not the slightest pretence of being a highbrow. Out of doors was his special hobby; an easy-going sportsman was what he looked and that sure was what he was. They discussed the immediate future; wondered when and how and where they should tie the knot and so on. "I'll nip along to the Button Club presently—the box with the windows we passed just now—and write a line to my mother. You haven't met her yet, have you? She's a great dear, she really is, even if she does live all the year round in Shropshire. I'll tell her we want to get married as soon as we can. And

as we are both quiet, homely sort of birds we sha'n't want much in the way of a wedding."

Mame was all in favour. No doubt some of the folks would want to be there. But the quieter the better. She was never one for display. And when Bill declared he would not mind how soon they were "spliced," with this also she was in cordial agreement.

These were moments of real happiness. And yet, and yet, there was just one moment of swords. After they had sat a full two hours on the garden chairs, absorbed in the contemplation of each other and their future plans, they got up and made a move in the direction of tea. It could be purchased and consumed in an open-air enclosure thoughtfully provided by the London County Council. They were in the act of crossing the park's central artery when Mame's eye was caught by a gently gliding limousine. It was a wonderful dingus, the latest word, with chauffeur and footman whose liveries matched the peerless machine. Two ladies were seated inside. Both, however, appeared to be gazing ostentatiously in another direction.

"Say, look, honey. Gwendolen Childwick. Is that her Mommer?"

Bill's answer was a rather amused but quite indifferent yes. "Mommer carries a bit of sail, I always think. Some of these Fifth Avenue queens do, they say."

"Very rich, I suppose." Mame had an odd fluttering of the nerves for which she couldn't quite account.

"I forget how many millions of dollars. But something pretty tall."

"Well, they needn't treat us as if we were just dirt."

"Didn't see us." Bill took an obvious and common-sense view of a quite trivial incident.

"No, they just didn't," Mame showed venom. "But I guess they'd have seen *you* soon enough if I hadn't been with you."

In the particular circumstances it was not a very judicious thing to have said. But even Mdlle. L'Espinasse may nod on occasion. Not, of course, that it really mattered. Bill seemed absolutely indifferent. If one happens to be an old-established British marquis one is apt to take things as they come. Not his to reason why Gwendolen and her mamma looked pointedly in an opposite direction.

Bill calmly brushed the incident aside. But Mame lacked something of his detachment. Her gaiety grew suddenly less. That glimpse of Gwendolen seemed to cast a shadow over the rosy prospect. Why it should do so Mame did not know. What was Miss Three Ply Flannelette and all her millions of dollars to either of them now?

Still there was no denying that the cup of tea did not taste so good as Mame had expected. Perhaps it was that a faint cloud had crossed the sun of her great happiness, although so far as the September blue was concerned, hardly a puff was visible. Yet, in spite of the glory of the day, a touch of autumn began to steal upon the air.

They didn't sit long over their tea. Mame felt in

duty bound to return to the day's rather neglected work. Bill, moreover, had a very important letter to write to his mother. But they continued to enjoy each other's company all the way back along Rotten Row and up by Hamilton Place, where Bill, after duly making an appointment at the same highly convenient spot for the morrow, entered the Button Club to do the deed.

Mame walked slowly along to Half Moon Street. For some reason she was feeling more anxious, more excited than she cared about when she entered the flat. She shed her gloves and took off her hat. And then she went into the small room in which most of their work was done and resolutely confronted the typewriter.

Violet had not yet come in. This was fortunate. Mame felt in need of a respite in which to collect her thoughts. For the hour was at hand when the dramatic announcement must be made. Violet would have to know. And she had better know now.

There was really no reason, Mame argued with her somewhat fluttered self, why she should worry. It was not as if she had been guilty of anything dishonourable. Violet was not going to like it, of course. Beyond a doubt she had set her heart on Bill marrying Gwendolen Childwick. Still that was merely a question of Gwendolen's dollars. Bill obviously did not want to marry mere dollars. So from that point of view it was doing him a simple kindness to save him from that fate. Dollars are not everything. Besides, as one of the johns in the office calendar had explicitly stated, In

love and war all is fair. Even if Bill's sister took it amiss, Mame felt she need not reproach herself.

Clucking away at the typewriter, she hardened her heart. The time was now. It was her duty to break the news before the world was a day older.

While she nursed this growing resolution she heard the front door open. And then came Violet's light but decided step in the hall. A minute later when she came into the room she lacked nothing of that genial insouciance which Mame so much admired. But as Mame glanced up she was a little chilled by her eyes. The absence of real friendliness, which once had verged on affection, was now complete.

"Where have you been to, my pretty maid?" The question was humorously put. Had Violet been dying it would still have been a point of honour with her to put things humorously.

"Getting engaged to be mar-ri-ed, please m'm, she said." The retort was quick. It was also bold. Mame was wise enough to appreciate that this particular bull would have to be taken by the horns.

Violet was startled. It was not a bit of use dissembling: she was really startled. Mame, besides, once she had begun upon the cold drawn truth was no believer in half measures. She lifted her left hand from the typewriter and flashed its new brilliancy before the astonished eyes of her questioner.

"How beautiful!" There was nothing in the gay voice to betray anxiety; all the same a slight change of colour rather gave Bill's sister away. "My dear, you

have told me nothing of this." Mame could not help admiring her friend's fortitude. "Tell me, who is the happy man?"

"Mean to say you can't guess?" Each syllable expressed incredulity.

"How should one?"

Violet kept up the game pretty well, but the note of innocence was pitched just a shade high. Evidently she felt it necessary to play for time.

"Aw, shucks, honey. Cut it out." In the stress of pure emotion Mame had a sudden relapse to the primitive manner of her fathers. "Who do you think it can be? The Prince of Wales?"

Violet's heart was sinking, sinking, but she contrived to keep up the farce. "Not a ghost of an idea."

"Take three guesses."

But Violet only took one. "You don't mean to say, you . . ."

All pretence was at an end. Bill's sister spoke with a slow reproachfulness that caused Mame to feel decidedly uncomfortable. But she determined to put the best face she could on the matter. "Why not?" she laughed. "Do you blame me?"

"Blame you!" The note in the disciplined voice sounded odd. Violet's face and tone hardened in a way that Mame found rather alarming. "What you really deserve is a thorough good beating."

For one vital moment it looked as if this really was going to be a case of teeth and claws. But of a sudden Violet took herself strongly in hand.

Never in her life had it been so difficult for Violet to wear the mask of indifference. She would have liked to have killed this marauder. But in her heart she knew that she herself was almost wholly responsible for a tragic situation. She had been properly punished for the levity of her approach to certain conventions. How could she have been paid out better for playing the fool?

However, this was not a moment for self-castigation. She must act. The matter was so horribly serious that it hardly bore thinking about. All the tact, all the diplomacy she could muster had now to be brought into play.

A trying pause threatened to intensify the awkwardness of things. And then said Violet in a tone that would keep hardening in spite of herself: "Before you mention this to anyone, I hope you will see my mother. Will you promise that?"

Mame did not answer at once. Her instinct was to ask Bill. Perhaps Violet may have guessed as much. For she was not to be put off. She made her demand again and with an urgency quite new in Mame's experience of her. This was a new Violet altogether.

"Please, you must promise." The gay voice had grown coldly resolute. "Something is due to us, you know."

There was cause to regret those words as soon as they were uttered. For their effect was to stiffen Mame's feathers.

"We'll leave that to him, I guess." There was resentment in the answer.

Considerable strength of will was needed for Violet to withhold the remark that Bill was a perfect fool. But she was able to fight down the raging tempest. "I am going to telegraph for my mother to come up at once. And in the name of our friendship I ask you to keep the engagement a close secret until—until you have seen her."

Mame was inclined to resent the tone. But lurking somewhere in her crude yet complex mind was that rather unfeminine sense, fair play. She could not quite forget, after all, how much she owed to Violet. In the circumstances she had a right to demand this of her.

"Well, honey, I'll do what you say," drawled Mame with light drollery. "But I can't answer for that l'i'l bird."

Lady Violet's eyes sparkled rather grimly, but she managed to keep her voice under control. "No, you can't, of course." By a mighty effort she got back on to the plane she was determined to occupy. "But if you can persuade him to hold his tongue for a day or two you'll be helping everybody—yourself not least of all."

The depth of the argument was a point beyond Mame. She could not pretend to be versed in the ways of the hothouse world she was about to enter. But evidently her friend had powerful reasons. Even if she was cutting up pretty rough there would be no harm in humouring her. Nay, it would be wise. Be-

sides, as Mame's conscience was careful to insist, it was right to make this concession. No need to stand too much on dignity, particularly as she had a real regard for Violet and so must do nothing to embitter their relations.

"I'll do all *I* can anyway to keep it a secret until I've seen your Mommer," said Mame generously.

XLIII

THE next day, about six o'clock in the evening, Lady Violet was sitting alone with some very hard and rueful thoughts when Davis, with a face of doom, portentously announced the Marchioness of Kidderminster.

She had come up post haste from Shropshire. On the top of Violet's urgent but cryptic telegram had arrived an amazing letter from Bill. Their mother, on the spur of the moment, had made up her mind to catch the 11:15 at Millfield, which in turn would pick up the express at Shrewsbury; and as she succeeded as a rule in doing the things upon which she set her mind, why here she was.

The greetings of mother and daughter were affectionate, but they were sorry. Both felt that a catastrophe had occurred; and it was of such magnitude that they were quite stunned by its force.

"A little American, you say, without any money?"

Lady Kidderminster quite correctly had the sense of what her daughter had said. Those, indeed, were her words. "It's terrible," said Lady Kidderminster piteously. From her point of view it was.

Both ladies were much inclined to blame themselves; and also to blame each other. Lady Kidderminster

could not help reproaching Violet for turning loose such a dangerous creature upon a simple unprotected society. In future, perhaps, she would be more careful in her choice of friends. Violet retaliated by saying that her mother ought never to have let the summer go by without simply making Bill marry Gwendolen Childwick. Wretched boy, it was the only marriage he could make if he was to keep his head above water!

However, it was no use repining. There was no time for that. Mother and daughter were both people of resolution. And they had great common sense. Something would have to be done to stop this ruinous affair. But, they asked themselves, what? Already it had gone much too far. It would be impossible for Bill to back out now.

"Our only chance, my dear," said Violet slowly and forcefully, "and I own it's a very slender one, is to see what can be done with this Miss Du Rance."

"But if she's as horrid and as pushful as you say, she will be the last person in the world to give him up."

"Horrid she is not." Mame's friend spoke judicially. "Quite a nice little thing in her way. Personally I like her very much, but as a wife for Bill she is unthinkable; particularly as she has to earn her own living."

"All the less likely to give him up." Lady Kidderminster was doleful indeed.

Still the only hope they had was to act as if that possibility still remained.

"It's so slender that it seems pretty hopeless." That

was Lady Violet's candid opinion. But they must try something. The thing was so tragic they could not possibly take it lying down.

They were discussing the catastrophe in all its painful bearings when Mame blundered into the hornets' nest. She had been walking with Bill in the park; she was still feeling very happy if just a little anxious; and when she abruptly opened the door and came into the drawing room, her thoughts being elsewhere, it did not occur to her that she would find Lady Kidderminster seated in it.

Mame knew at a glance who she was. Bill was remarkably like his mother. This dame was quite handsome, even if her face was a bit worn. She was also stately; but as Mame immediately discovered, she was accessible, kindly, human.

She got up as soon as Mame entered. Before Mame had time to display embarrassment or shyness the good lady offered her hand. And then, as Mame was in the act of taking it, Bill's mother gave her one quick but covert glance, which had not a trace of hostility.

Somewhere amid Mame's infinite complexity was a longing for affection. But already she had steeled herself for a display of cattishness. However, there was nothing unkind about Bill's mother, sharp though Mame's instinct was to detect it. There was nothing unkind in Lady Violet either. Instinctively Mame knew that both these women must be hating her like poison and it was almost miraculous how they managed to cover up their feelings.

For five minutes or so Bill's mother and sister talked about him, pleasantly and brightly and entertainingly. He was such a dear, dear fellow, his mother said. But he was quite irresponsible. Agreeably and rather wittily, she gave anecdotes of Bill's childhood. She had quite a fund of these; and they were told so well, with such point and humour that Mame was really amused. The prospective daughter-in-law could not help admiring Lady Kidderminster. Her talk had much of Lady Violet's charm, with a Victorian polish and correctness in the place of the modern slang whose abundance in the daughter old-fashioned people were apt to deplore. What the mother lacked in mordancy she made up for in kindliness and those manners of the heart which at all times are sure of their appeal.

Mame was quick to respond. She was grateful for the way in which this lady, with the most beguiling voice she had ever listened to, exercised these gifts for her benefit. This meeting might have been so awkward. Nay, it might have been downright unpleasant. But Bill's mother carried things off in a style which Mame considered to be perfection.

For one thing Lady K. did not force the note. There was no welcoming her into the nest among her chickens. Mame was shrewdly waiting for that, because that was where this nice, good, clever dame would rather have fallen over the mat. But she was too genuine. There was a certain reserve, a certain dignity behind all that she said to Mame. Even if there was nothing constrained, still less was there anything

effusive. It was the golden mean. Miss Du Rance was frankly accepted as Bill's affianced, even if she was very far from being the particular girl his mother had chosen for him.

"But please, you will promise, will you not, to refrain from speaking of this matter to anyone until—until I have had an opportunity of discussing it fully with my son." The careful phrases were so urgent that Mame, who did not want to give any such promise, felt the best she could do was to make it.

Lady K. thanked her gravely. "And I wonder, my dear"—it was the first time the stately dame had addressed Mame as "my dear"—"if you feel inclined to come down to Shropshire for a few days. It might interest you to see the sort of life we lead."

Politely Mame was sure that it would.

"When can you come?"

Mame winged a glance to her partner in the newspaper world. The acceptance of the invitation chiefly depended upon the attitude of Celimene.

"No time like the present, is there?" was that attitude promptly and concisely expressed.

"But"—Mame's quaint honesty raised a smile in both ladies—" 'tisn't fair, honey, to leave you here alone to do all the digging."

"I can plough a lonely furrow for a week at any rate. And if I find I can't I'll get Gerty Smith to give me a hand. You must go back to Shropshire with my mother. We both so want to know what you think of the Towers."

Mame was puzzled by this cordiality. But she was very keen to see Warlington Towers, that stately English home which for the future would be hers. There was nothing in the manner of mother and daughter to suggest that she would not be an immensely welcome guest.

Reassured, almost in spite of herself, by all this seeming friendliness, Mame asked when Lady Kidderminster proposed to return to her home.

"To-morrow, my dear, by the first train. I'm such a country mouse; and even one day in London makes a hole in one's purse."

"Well, I don't think I can go to-morrow."

"But of course you can." Lady Violet was definite. "And you must. No scrimshanking. You must go down with my mother to-morrow morning by the 9:50 from Paddington, the best train of the day."

Mame was still inclined to resist having her mind made up for her in this way, but Celimene was resolute. "My mother will be quite hurt if you back out now. Besides"—with a laugh—"it'll be so much better to go and get it over."

"But—" protested Mame.

However, it was not a bit of use. Lady Violet had such a powerful habit of making people's minds up for them.

XLIV

IT happened, therefore, that the very next morning Mame found herself travelling down to Shropshire in the company of Lady Kidderminster. Odd and unexpected as the journey was, she was a little inclined to be annoyed with herself for having allowed Mommer and Lady Violet to hustle her so peremptorily into undertaking it. There was weakness in such yielding. And to a practical go-getter who knew the value of the will, this was not a good sign. The first thing she would have to study as the wife of Bill must be the art of standing up to her in-laws.

These were clever women, not a doubt about it. Evidently they were versed in the most important of all problems, how to get your own way. They had force and they had skill had Mommer and Lady Violet; they didn't let you see their hands, but just set quietly to work and made you do the things they wanted. She was a little simp to let them put one over on her like that.

Still, why worry? There was no reason why she should not be seated opposite Mommer in the darned old Great Western Pullman. She was real nice was Mommer. As easy as pie. All the same her daughter-in-law-to-be shrewdly guessed that she was not just

the simple old shoe that she looked. Even before they had reached the first stop, which was Reading, Mame had made a private vow that as far as Mommer was concerned she would keep her eyes skinned and watch out.

The journey was quite pleasant. All the way from Paddington to Shrewsbury, where they left the express and took a local train to Millfield, the nearest station to Warlington Towers, the lady in whose charge Mame found herself persisted steadily in being charming. Mame could not help liking her. Seen as it were from a distance, Mommer's stateliness was a little alarming; but at close range, in friendly and intimate talk all fear of it seemed to go.

There were no surprises. Everything went agreeably and well. It was when they got off the train finally at Millfield that the surprises began. There was a five-mile drive to the Towers, as Mame had been told; and she had rather confidently expected it to be performed in an elegant motor, with two servants. But nothing of the kind. In the Millfield station yard a one-horse brougham awaited them. It was decidedly well kept, but it looked out of date; and although the coachman wore a smart cockade and had the face of an ancestral portrait, no brisk footman shared the seat by his side.

An obsequious porter and a rural station master, who was even more obsequious, ushered them into the brougham's rather stuffy interior. It was plain from the manner of these officials that even if Mommer did cling

to the old modes of travel she was a power in this corner of the land. Still Mame continued to be a bit surprised by the one-horse brougham. Yet this was no more than a prelude to the far bigger surprise that was in store.

After the elderly horse had clip-clopped along the dusty by-roads for some little time, Mame caught a sudden glimpse of a noble set of towers "bosomed high in tufted trees" as a poetic john had expressed it in the office calendar. There was also a fine park full of deer with high stone walls around it.

"Warlington Towers, I guess." There was a thrill in Mame's voice as she pointed enthusiastically through the carriage window.

Lady Kidderminster said "yes." The note in her voice sounded the reverse of enthusiastic.

At that moment they came upon some beautiful wrought iron gates with an ancient coat of arms in the middle, flanked by a pair of stone pillars, each with a fabulous winged monster upon the top. Beyond the gates was a porter's lodge and then a vista of glorious trees in the form of a long avenue which led straight to the doors of the famous mansion.

"It's just too lovely." Mame clapped her hands.

She quite expected the one-horse brougham to stop at those magnificent gates, all picked out in black and gold, and turn into that wonderful avenue. But it did nothing of the kind. It went on and on by the side of the high stone walls which shut out the view of the Towers completely.

"Don't you live there?" Mame was a little puzzled and perhaps a shade anxious.

Lady Kidderminster sighed gently. "We don't live there now, my dear."

"Oh," breathed Mame. Somehow she felt rather let down.

The old horse clip-clopped along by the grassy marge of the interminable and forbidding stone walls until they reached a tiny village. In the middle was a neat public house, with a roof of straw thatch, and its ancient sign the Treherne Arms much stained by the weather. Past this the brougham went, a couple of hundred yards or so, and then turned in on the left, through a swing gate and along a carriage drive.

At the end of the drive was a house built of stone. It was a good, honest-looking place and by its style was old. But compared with the pomp and glory of the Towers it was quite small. Nay, as Mame was forced to view it, this house was a trifle poor. Here the brougham stopped. It was the end of their journey.

The place which Lady Kidderminster had occupied for the last five years was called the Dower House. It was comfortable enough and everything in it was in such perfect taste that it was only Mame's lively anticipation of the Towers and their magnificence which lent it an aura of inferiority. Really the Dower House was charming. It had the loveliest things. There was a view of distant hills from its bedroom windows; and at the back of the house was an old-world garden, a rare pleasaunce of plants and shrubs and very ancient

trees. If the Towers had not caught Mame's imagination she would have considered the Dower House just elegant.

At dinner, which was at eight o'clock, and to Mame's robust appetite was a meal at once meagre and inadequate, there was only one other besides the hostess. This was a Miss Carruthers, a young-old body, tall and faded and thin, who spoke in a slow, rather peeved voice which sounded frightfully aristocratic. She seemed kindly and well meaning, but she was dull, terribly dull. Even Lady Kidderminster seemed inclined to yield to the atmosphere of Miss Carruthers. Anyhow, by dinner time, a good deal of her metropolitan sparkle had fled.

Mame hoped, as she swallowed the thin soup and the minute portions of fish and chicken the regular old john of a butler, with wonderful manners and side whiskers, handed to her at carefully regulated intervals, that the absence of sparkle was only going to be temporary. But there was nothing on the table stronger than lemonade to excite it. And zip of some kind was certainly needed. However, it was not forthcoming at the table or in the drawing room afterwards, where no fire was in the rather cavernous grate, although mid-September evenings in Shropshire are apt to be chill.

There was neither electricity nor gas throughout the house, and when Mame, following the example of the other ladies, chose a candle from among a number laid out on a table in the hall, and ascended solemnly to her bed, she felt desolate. Somehow things were not

as she had expected to find them. Just what those expectations had been she was unable to say. But they had certainly included the Towers.

All the same she slept. She was young and healthy and the pulse of life beat high. And she had a forward-looking mind. But in the present case the habitual hope of a morrow more alluring came to nought. The Dower House did not seem to improve on acquaintance. It was dull. No use mincing it—it was dull. Lady Kidderminster continued to be kindness itself; Miss Carruthers was also kind; but they seemed only to converse on formal subjects and in a rather perfunctory way. Then the food! It was beautifully cooked and served, and what there was of it was of the best quality, yet in Miss Du Rance it left a void.

A factor in their dulness, no doubt, was the absence of Lady Kidderminster's family. Violet, of course, was in London; and of the two young ones, Doris was in her first year at Cambridge and Marjorie at school at Worthing. "When those two pickles come here for the holidays we are much more lively, aren't we, Mildred?"

Mildred, Miss Carruthers, who agreed with Lady Kidderminster in most things, agreed in this.

After a rather dispiriting breakfast in which Mame had to be content with a boiled egg, some poor coffee, some thin toast and an elegant spoonful of jam, she took the air of the domain with Miss Carruthers. Like everything else about the place, the air of the domain was good in quality, yet it did not seem to be exhila-

rating. Mame felt inclined to fix some of the responsibility upon Miss Carruthers. She was as good as gold, but she wanted pep.

In the course of this ordeal in the garden, Mame's great disappointment once more recurred. She could not forget the Towers; their absence filled her with a sense of grievance.

"Why don't Lady K. live at the big house?" She put the question frankly. "Some place that. I guess I'd want to live there if I owned it."

Miss Carruthers hesitated a moment and then said in that plaintive voice which already was beginning to get on Mame's nerves. "Cousin Lucy can't afford to do that. She's been so hit by the War. The Towers eats money. One has to be rich to keep up a place of that kind."

"She isn't rich, then?"

"Dear, no."

"What'll she do with that old place?" There was keen disappointment in Mame's tone.

"Cousin Lucy, I believe, has not decided yet. At present the Towers is let to some rich Americans."

"Any I know?" asked Mame. From her manner it might have been a hobby of hers to specialise in rich Americans. It would do this dame no harm to think so anyway.

The slow, plaintive answer of Miss Caruthers was unexpected and it was startling. "You may know them. I believe they go about in London a good deal. Some people called Childwick."

"Childwick." Mame gave a slight gasp. "Have they a girl named Gwendolen?" Yet there was no need to ask. She knew.

So plaintive grew the voice of Miss Carruthers that Mame longed to shake her. "Gwendolen is their only child. A great heiress."

Mame felt something turn inside her heart. She bit her lip; and then she gave a little snort of defiance. Miss Carruthers sighed long and grievously.

XLV

THE knowledge which came in its fulness to Mame in an after-luncheon talk with Lady Kidderminster, that the Towers was let to the Childwicks on a lease of seven years with an option of purchase, did nothing to stem the growing tide of her gloom. She might have guessed. But the recognised fact hit her hard. The Childwicks of all people! That supercilious queen to get away with the whole bag of tricks.

Lady K. was quite candid. She had the same openness in discussing high finance as in less intimate affairs of life. Since the War they had simply been hanging on by their eyelids as it were. The Scotch property had gone; so had the property in Lancashire; the town house was let, also to the Childwicks, those providential folk, who had lately decided to make England their home. Everybody thought it *so* fortunate to have such *good* tenants for the Towers; people who could not only afford to keep up the place in the old way, but who were likely to take a permanent interest in it.

Miss Du Rance was constrained to think so too. As she peered into the eyes of Bill's mother she could not help admiring her fortitude. How this dame must loathe her, little interloper! What plans she had wrecked! Yet there was nothing about this woman,

and there never had been, to give the least inkling of what her real feelings were towards her.

Not once, it was true, since Mame's arrival at the Dower House, had Lady Kidderminster mentioned Bill. The other queer old pet, that Miss Carruthers, had also refrained from mentioning him. Otherwise all was ease and charm and friendliness, although it sure had a trick of fizzling into the dead alive.

This quality of not being quite on the earth, so to speak, was not confined to the inmates of the Dower House. It was shared by the friends and neighbours. Screams of all kinds seemed to make a point of turning up about teatime. Almost invariably they were of Mame's own sex. And such clothes as they wore! And such comic one-horse shays as for the most part they came in! Frightfully well-bred they were with real Court manners, full of ceremonial. Had good Lady K. been England's queen these dear old buzzards could not have treated her with more deference.

It was the air these callers had of being half alive that most impressed Mame. Her mind went back to the tabbies of Fotheringay House, at whose hands she had endured long weeks of boredom. These friends of the family were a different breed of tabby; they were politer, gentler, less inclined to scratch, but their faces were just as pinched and bloodless and their style of dressing quite as odd. Such drolls as they were with their long tailor-mades and stiff boned net collars, and their queer hats and trinkets and stout boots with very flat heels.

They looked depressing. And they were depressing. Their talk in the main was of bulbs. Mame was not in the least interested in bulbs. She could raise no enthusiasm over what these funniments were going to put in in the spring. These gardeners, inoffensive and well meaning though they were, bored Mame to tears. If this was the social life of an English county, she opined she was the sort of mouse that would stay in the town.

Three days of the Dower House began to tell on Miss Du Rance. It may have been the food, the people, a peculiarity of the air, but she began to feel as lacking in zip as the friends and neighbours. At the mere sight of them she had an inclination to weep; and strange to say at the sight of her one or two of these old things, who evidently were pretty deep in the family confidence, seemed inclined to do the same. One old pet, indeed, with just a shade more kick than the rest—Miss Carruthers said she had been a Bedchamber-woman to Queen Victoria—managed to convey a hint to Miss Du Rance that the friends and neighbours could only regard her in the light of a national calamity.

All this was discouraging. Even had there been no thoughts of Gwendolen Childwick to disturb Mame o'nights, this visit to Bill's mother would hardly have been a bed of roses. She missed sadly the brisk life, the gay companionship of London. Here was nothing doing. From early morn till dewy eve there was nothing doing. She dipped into a few old-fashioned novels; she read the *Morning Post,* which was not delivered un-

til the afternoon; she was initiated into various games of patience by the kindly but mournful Miss Carruthers; she strolled about the garden with Lady Kidderminster and learned to give an opinion on the few remaining asters, chrysanthemums and dahlias, but somehow you could not call it being alive.

By now, moreover, there was beginning to arise in Mame a feeling of remorse. It was not an emotion she would ever have suspected herself of harbouring. Practical go-getters have not, as a rule, much time for remorse. They are usually too busy. Besides, where was the use? Remorse never cut ice since the world began.

To make matters worse, on the morning of the fifth day came a letter from Bill. He wrote with far less than his usual optimism. In fact he was just a bit troubled. He had been talking things over with his mother, whom he had seen when she came up to town; and she had said the family finances were in such a tangle that if he married Mame there would be absolutely no money for a separate establishment. She took rather a gloomy view of the whole matter, but personally, he was quite willing "to chance it" if Mame was. He sent her heaps of love and he was counting the hours for her return and he thought that in the circumstances the sooner they were "spliced" the better.

The letter was full of affection and humour, yet Mame could not rid her mind of the feeling that breakers were ahead. She was perturbed. And something

which happened in the course of that very afternoon deepened a sense of unrest.

"Do you care to come and see the Towers, my dear?" asked Lady Kidderminster, as they lingered over their afternoon luncheon coffee. "The Childwicks are away, but I'm sure the housekeeper, Mrs. Norris, will not mind your looking over the house if it will interest you."

Nothing would interest Mame more.

"So glad. We will go along presently. It is such a good day for a walk."

The day was really good, one of those soft, mildly sunny days of late September that lure one so genially into the open. From the Dower House to the Towers, door to door, was just a mile; and Mame, sauntering with Lady Kidderminster, found the pilgrimage rather enjoyable. Her hostess was still very kind and friendly even if an inward weight seemed to be bearing her down. Mame longed to speak of Bill. She would like to have drawn Mommer on the subject of when they would be able to marry; yet to butt in upon that vexed question might entirely spoil the pleasure of their stroll.

Mame was impressed by the Towers. She felt justified in calling it a palace. It certainly was a wonderful house; one of the oldest and finest in England and very well kept. A lovely park of many rich woodland acres gave it just the setting that it needed. In spite of Mame's determination to remain a democrat at heart, she could not overcome a slight feeling of awe as they

passed through the lodge gates, so impressively emblazoned, and walked slowly along the glorious avenue that led to the Treherne home. The place had such an air. Fancy having it for one's very own to live in.

She was entitled, in a sense, to a feeling of proprietorship, yet only too well did she know that she did not in the least match up with Warlington Towers. After all, she could not help thinking ruefully as they came up to the main entrance, with doors of solid black oak, she was the merest nobody, a little newspaper girl, a sharp-witted adventuress who had not even put herself through college. Who was Mame Durrance, the rejected of New York and London, that she should fix herself into such a frame. It was wrong for a go-getter to have these ideas, but there was something in the grandeur, the style, the solidity of this mansion which had stood just like that since the time of the Tudors, which kind of put one over on you. If you had any feelings at all, if you had a streak of imagination, however slight, a vein of idealism, however weak, a tendency to uplift or inconveniences of that kind, this house was bound to get you thinking.

They learned from the housekeeper that the Childwicks were expected next week, when a large party would assemble for the shooting. But Mame was not much impressed by the news. That girl Gwendolen, for all her dollars and her airs, was almost as much an interloper. What was Three Ply Flannelette anyway? Not so much better, was it, than writing for the press?

Bitter thoughts accompanied Mame through the nobly proportioned rooms, up the majestic staircase and then down again to the noblest room of all. It seemed vast, that particular room; the sense of its magnitude came out and hit you as you entered. The view from its great windows was unforgettable, but it was the room itself and the things it contained that made it so memorable. Tapestries, sofas, cabinets, chairs, tables, lovely bric-a-brac and candelabra, all were perfect in their kind and united in ministry to the higher perfection of which they formed a part.

It was the pictures on the walls that gave perhaps the biggest thrill. Portraits mostly: Lelys, Knellers and those old johns of the eighteenth century who knew how to put historical folks upon canvas. Among the famous guys in steel breastplates and periwigs and contemporary janes in ruffs and powder and what not, was a picture of a young man in knee-breeches and silk stockings and a stiff flounced coat with a sword, who might have been Bill. The resemblance was astonishing. Had Bill exchanged his modern tailor for that funny yet superbly picturesque rig that is just how he would have looked.

Mame was so struck by this likeness that she stopped to gaze at the words at the foot of the gilt frame:

"William, third marquis of Kidderminster. By Sir Peter Lely."

Yes, it was the real thing, this picture. But what, after all, was it compared to the room it was in and the harmony of which it was a symbol? History, romance,

power seemed all around. Again the spirit of place got Mame thinking.

It was the gentle, low voice of Lady Kidderminster that brought her slowly back to the present and to her own self. "Shall we rest a moment, my dear? Here in the sun. This is always my favourite spot; how one loves a room facing south! There is more real warmth here than anywhere else in the house."

As Lady Kidderminster spoke she sat down on a large, high-backed sofa, very choicely carved, which was placed immediately below Lely's third marquis. She made a place beside her for Mame, who sat down too. There the sun was very pleasant, as it streamed in through the great window opposite. The trees of the park could be seen and the deer browsing under them. Not so much as the ticking of a clock broke the rapt stillness. What a peace there was upon everything, what order, what a hushed solemnity! It was like being in a cathedral. The aura of this room in its grandeur and stateliness was overpowering.

Mame was seldom at a loss for words. But seated on this sofa by the side of Lady Kidderminster she felt a little shy of the sound of her own voice. Somehow it didn't seem to belong. She waited for her companion to say something. Those sweet and quiet tones went so much better with the carpets and the pictures and the scene beyond those windows.

Suddenly Mame grew aware that the hand next hers had taken it in its clasp. Then very softly and quietly Bill's mother began to talk. Her beautiful low voice in

its ordered perfection was as much a part of those surroundings as all the other lovely things of which Mame could not help being sensible. Yet the words it wove soon began to press upon her heart.

In a fashion of curious simplicity, which revealed everything in the most practical and matter-of-fact way, Bill's mother showed what an effort she had made to hold on to this inheritance. Everybody had hoped that he would marry Miss Childwick. She was deeply in love with him, and there was a time, only a short month or so ago, when it was thought that he was in love with her. A marriage had been almost arranged for the early summer, yet for some trivial reason it had been deferred. And now, and now, the gentle tones deepened into tragedy, it would never take place, and Bill would have to give up the last and dearest of his possessions.

Great sacrifices had been made to keep things going against the time when he should marry. They owed it to him to do that. And he, dear fellow, owed it, not to those who were proud to make sacrifices, but to the order of things, so long established, of which he was the *clou,* to marry in a direction that would ensure their maintenance.

"You see, my dear," said Lady Kidderminster, and for the first time a faint gleam of humour lit that lovely voice of ever-deepening tragedy, "it is not that we own places like the Towers. They own us. It is Bill's duty to those who have made this old house what it is"—she waved a gentle hand to those solemn assenting walls

"to keep it in the state to which it has pleased providence to call it. I hope you appreciate, my dear, what a dreadful wrench it is going to be, not only for us, but for this old house, with so many historical associations, to pass into other hands."

Only too well was Mame able to appreciate that. The streak of imagination in her had never been so uncomfortable as at that painful moment.

"I simply cannot bear to think of his losing all this," Bill's mother went on. "I simply cannot bear to think of all this losing him. They need each other; they were created for each other; they can never be as they were if they are allowed to drift apart. The Childwicks are excellent people and they have a lien on this house, which may be exercised if dear Gwendolen does not marry Bill. They will, I am sure, do the place no dishonour, but I, for one, cannot bear to think of such a break in a long tradition. The Towers expects the head of the family to do his duty by it, in the way of his forbears who made it the thing it is."

Mame did not speak. Not only was she seeing certain things at a new angle, she was also seeing the world in general in a new way. The process was distinctly irksome.

"Any girl who really cares for him," Lady K. went on with that candour which to Mame was so surprising, "will understand what life exacts of him, will understand where his duty lies."

In the silence that followed these words Mame hardly ventured to look at the face of the woman who sat by

her side. But she saw that Lady Kidderminster's eyes were wet. This was a brave woman. It was impossible not to respect her point of view. Indeed, seated in that room, with all those associations clustering about it, there seemed to be only one way of looking at things. And that was the way of Bill's mother.

XLVI

MAME returned to London after an absence of exactly one week. Seldom had she been more eager for anything than to exchange the rather dreary stuffiness of the Dower House for the life and bustle of the town. Yet the Mame Durrance who had left Paddington a week ago was not the same person who came back to that terminus. Something had happened to her in the meantime. As yet she did not quite know what the something was. But there were the beginnings of a new habit of introspection in her; and from this she learned that she was in the throes of change.

Life, somehow, was not quite as she had left it. She seemed to see it with new eyes. Even the buses and the taxis and the faces of the passers-by were different from what they had been a week ago. They seemed to strike her in a new way. It was as if the rather trite and funny old world she had always lived in had become suddenly enlarged. Everything had grown more complex. The inner nature of things, about which she was troubling for the first time, was full of deep and mysterious meaning.

This state of mind did not make for happiness, as Mame soon discovered. For one thing it was out of harmony with the mentality of a practical go-getter.

But as she expressed the phenomenon to herself, that old house had put one over on her. It was absurd that a mere inanimate collection of sticks and stones should have the power to do anything of the kind, yet it was not a bit of use shirking the fact that it had done so.

There were two Mame Durrances now. Perhaps there always had been, but the one the old house in Shropshire had evoked had lain dormant. And now that it was aroused it promised to become a mighty inconvenient yoke fellow. Hitherto it had been the go-getter who had held command of the ship; a common-sensible, up-and-coming, two-and-two-makes-four sort of unit, who saw its duty a dead sure thing and went and did it. But the sleeper, whom one week of Shropshire had awakened, was a very different kind of bird.

No doubt, the new and tiresome entity that had sprung to birth was what the world meant by an idealist. It appeared to judge by another standard. There were the things you could do and the things you couldn't do. The business part of Mame knew nothing of this. It only did the things it wanted to do.

A week of the Dower House had rather handed a haymaker to Mame's utilitarian world. To such an extent had it mixed its values that she did not quite know where she stood in it. Yet amid the chaos she retained in a high degree her natural clearness of vision.

It was nearing the dinner hour when Mame's taxi deposited her and her neat luggage at 16b Half Moon

Street. Lady Violet, wearing her smartest evening frock, was on the point of going out. She greeted Mame with the air of bright cheerfulness that never seemed to desert her. But the returned traveller had only to glance at the eyes of her friend to learn that she was not feeling so very bright or so very cheerful. She surprised that look of never-say-die she had seen in the eyes of Lady Kidderminster. It was impossible not to respect the pluck of these women.

"Had a good time?"

"Ye-es." Mame's answer was a trifle dubious even if she did her best not to make it so.

"What did you think of the Towers?"

"Bully!" said Mame. And then she asked, less out of a sense of duty than from a desire to change the subject, "How's the work been getting on?"

"Gerty Smith is splendid. She's such a worker." Lady Violet sighed humorously. "Oh, how I hate work!"

Mame fully believed her. Girls of her special type must long ago have overlaid the habit. The conviction in Celimene's voice did not lessen Mame's respect for her. She had real grit, this girl, to be able to buckle to in the way she did.

"There's a letter for you from New York." Lady Violet pointed to the table. "I hope there's no complaint of the firm. We've not been sending many *bonnes bouches* in the way of news lately."

"No, we haven't," agreed Mame, as she opened the letter. It merely contained the monthly cheque.

"That'll come in very useful."

"I'll say yes, honey," was Mame's comment to herself.

Lady Violet then went off. She was dining with the Childwicks and going on with them to Covent Garden to the Russian ballet, and so did not expect to be home till rather late. Mame was left to a lonely meal round the corner at the Ladies Imperium. She had made a certain number of friends there, but she was not in a mood for promiscuous conversation; therefore she returned to an early bed.

She was very tired, bodily and mentally, but she had a restless and wakeful night. The go-getter and the idealist seemed to be quarrelling like fury all through the small hours. If there just wasn't the money to keep things going and she really cared for Bill, wasn't it her duty to stand aside?

Never heard such bunkum in my life, said the Go-getter.

Depends on how much you care for the boy, said the Idealist.

The Go-getter snorted.

You may snort, said the Idealist. But that's the case as I see it.

XLVII

THEY had arranged to meet in the park, the next morning at eleven. Bill was at the tryst, looking a picture of health with the genial sun of St. Martin's summer upon him. He really was good to gaze at; most girls would have thought so, anyway. There he was in his smart morning suit; bright as a new pin; and as gaily amusing as ever. He might not have had a care in the world. Indeed, as he greeted Mame with a flourish of hat and cane, it was hard to believe that he could have.

A week's absence had, if anything, endeared them to each other. Mame felt immensely proud of Bill as she came upon him by the railings of the Row, where he stood watching its numerous and decidedly miscellaneous collection of riders. Yes, he was a picture. As Mame beheld him, her mind went rather inconveniently back to the portrait of the third marquis, under which she had sat in that wonderful room at the Towers.

"Good to see you, Puss."

Low the voice and so beguiling. There was a tremendous fascination in this young man. They moved up towards Alexandra Gate and found two lonely chairs among the trees.

"And now for a good old pow wow." He began to write her name on the grass with the tip of his cane. "You're looking just a wee bit chippy, aren't you? Air of Shropshire take some digesting, eh? My mother is a clinker, isn't she? And Cousin Mildred. But their young lives are not exactly a beanfeast, what? And then the friends and neighbours. Did you meet the friends and neighbours?"

"Bushels."

At the look on Mame's shrewd and piquant countenance Bill cried "What ho!" in a fashion which startled a number of sparrows into sitting up and taking notice. "Then that funny old Dower House. I expect it rather gave you the pip."

As a matter of fact the Dower House had rather given Mame the pip but it hardly seemed good manners to say so.

"Own up. Honest Injun." Bill coolly surveyed the expressive countenance of Mame. "It always does me. But tell me, now, what do you think of the Towers? That's a bit of a landmark, isn't it?"

"Bully!" was Mame's formula for the Towers. It didn't quite express her feelings, but it seemed wise to keep to that inclusive simplicity.

"That's the word," Bill agreed.

Suddenly Mame took him up. "Bully isn't at all the word for a place like the Towers." To her own ear her voice grew harsh and strident. "It wants a better word than that. Doesn't carry the meaning,

that word. There's an atmosphere about that place and it gets you."

"Hadn't occurred to me."

"No." Mame looked at him sideways. She was a shade incredulous. "If I owned all that, just by right of birth, I'd see that nobody ever took it from me."

"Rather depend on your bank-book, wouldn't it?" Somehow Bill's casualness was almost like a blow. "You see the trouble with us as a family is that we haven't a bob."

Mame was fully informed of that. But why not get around and collect a few? She put the question frankly. To Bill, however, it had the merit of being new. It had simply never occurred to him.

"Why not?" In Mame's voice was a certain sternness.

"Haven't the savvee for one thing." Bill spoke lightly and easily. "Enormous brains you must have these days to hustle around. Vi is the only one of us with any mind at all. If she had been a man I believe she might have kept the Towers going. But it would have needed doing, you know. That place swallows money. Not a penny less than ten thousand a year would have been a bit of use."

"I'll say not. But isn't it worth while, don't you think, to take off your coat and go around and see if you can raise it?"

Bill began to whistle merrily. His sense of humour was sharply touched. "See me raising ten thousand a year with this old think box. I'm the utterest ass that

ever happened. Why, I can't even tot up a row of figures."

"I guess I'd learn. If my folks had had the Towers for five hundred years, do you suppose I'd let people like the Childwicks come along and take it off me?"

"No, I guess you wouldn't." Bill gazed in admiration at the determined face.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

To that forcible question Bill seemed quite unable to find an answer. Mame did not disguise that an answer was called for. "Your Mommer says that if you marry me you'll have to quit the Pinks."

"I know she does."

"And that you'll lose the Towers."

Bill owned ruefully that he knew that too.

"Doesn't it worry you any?"

Bill was silent a moment, then shook his head and said cheerfully, no.

"Well, it worries me, I'll tell the world."

He frowned a little. Something in the nature of a cloud passed over his sunny mind. Mame this morning hardly seemed to be quite so entertaining as usual. "Why worry," he said, "over things one can't help?"

It was Mame's turn to be silent. The frown that gathered about her honest face was more portentous than the one upon Bill's. "Things have got to be helped, it seems to me." She spoke slowly. It was as if the words tore her lips.

"I don't quite see how at the moment."

"There's just one way. I've been thinking it out.

We mustn't marry." The serious depth of Mame's tone added detonating power to this thunderbolt.

"But that's ridiculous." Bill was no longer casual.

"As I figure it out, it'll be more ridiculous if we do."

"My dear girl, we shall be able to rub along. There'll be a certain amount of money, even if the Towers does go and even if I have to leave the Army."

Mame shook a stern little head. She certainly was not as amusing this morning as usual. "Not if you keep your engagement with Gwendolen Childwick."

"I've never been engaged to Gwendolen Childwick," he indignantly broke in.

"Vi says you were as good as engaged to her. And so does your mother."

"These meddlesome women!" Bill spoke vexedly. "I see what it is. You've been letting 'em put the wind up."

A flush of crimson showed this to be a palpable hit.

"I give you my word there's been no engagement between Gwendolen and me," Bill earnestly added.

She knew there had not been. But it did not alter her view that if he was as sensible as he ought to be, there would be an engagement between them soon.

"Somebody's been getting at you." He was rather startled by the turn affairs were taking. "You're not yourself this morning. Tell me, Puss, don't you care for me any more?"

He looked into her troubled face with an anxiety which made her feel that she wanted to cry. In fact she had to bite her lip pretty hard to save herself from

exposing a most regrettable weakness. "It's because I care for you so much that I can't let you make a fool of yourself." The quaint voice trembled oddly. "If you marry me it's ruin and—and that's all there is to it."

He took a little white-gloved paw—she was looking most charmingly spick and span this morning—into his great brown fist. "Rot! A promise is a promise. I won't give you up."

"Don't be a fool." Pain, sheer and exquisite, drove her to speak bluntly and harshly. "I'd be a cuckoo in the nest. I don't belong. I won't amuse you always. And then you'd be sorry about the Towers. And you'd curse yourself for quitting the Army."

"I'll risk all that."

Mame had a struggle to keep her lip stiff. But she had enough will to say, "There's other folks to think of, you see."

"Rot! Why let 'em come spoiling the sport?"

"*I'd* be spoiling the sport. You and Gwendolen were getting on like a house on fire till I came by."

"What's come over you!" This was pure Quixotism. Slow in the uptake as he was, he knew how she hated Gwendolen.

"You don't know what a friend Vi has been to me. I owe just everything to her. If I butted in and spoiled it all, I'd never be able to look her in the face again. Then there's your Mommer. She's been so sweet to me, I'd just hate to go back on her."

Bill had to own that such feelings did Mame real

credit. But her attitude seemed to puzzle him a good-ish bit; it was rather beyond the order of nature.

"You're the nicest and best little girl I've met." He was dogged, defiant. "And I mean to hold on to you for all I'm worth."

Mame was horribly near tears, yet she still contrived to keep them in check. It was the bitterest moment life so far had given her. But this thing had to be.

XLVIII

AFTER a painful hour they parted and went their ways. Bill, in dudgeon, back to barracks; Mame with a heartache to Half Moon Street. All the way up Piccadilly she was accompanied by two voices. Mame Durrance you are a blame fool, said one. Stick it, girl, said the other. You are throwing away the chance of your life, said the Go-getter. If you really care for the boy, you just can't marry him, said the Idealist.

Never had she felt so miserable as when she let herself into the flat. Luckily Violet was not there. She was able to relieve her overwrought feelings with a little private howl. Then she felt better. In fact she was able to sit down and compose a few halting lines to Bill embodying her final decision and giving her reasons for it. That achieved, she went to her bedroom and fetched the engagement ring which ten days ago had given her such joy.

I must have been cuckoo to have accepted it.

Not half so cuckoo as you are now, you silly elf.

Miserably she packed it in its neat box and was in the act of enclosing the farewell letter when Violet came in. She had been taking the air.

One glance Violet gave to the red and swollen lids

and the face of tragedy. "Why, my dear, dear child!" The vein of kindness in her was deep and true. Those piteous eyes, that piteous mouth very surely roused it. "Do tell me." A naughty, dangerous little witch, but she was genuinely distressed to see Mame suffer. Something must have hurt her rather horribly. "Tell me, what is it?"

"I've let some of you folks put one over on me." Mame fiercely brushed aside new tears.

It was not a moment for a smile. Yet it was hard to resist one at that whimsical and quaint defiance. Even in the hour of desolation the minx was like no one else. She had an odd power of attraction. It was by no means easy to dislike her. After all she had only acted in strict accordance with her nature.

"What is it? Tell me."

Mame suddenly handed Celimene the letter she had written.

"You—you are sending back the ring?" There was a note in the voice of Bill's sister which suggested that it feared to be other than incredulous. "You—you are breaking off the engagement?"

"I'll say yes."

Perhaps for the first time in their intercourse real emotion flooded the face of the more accomplished woman of the world. "Dear child!" she said softly. And then abruptly turning aside as the bleak face of Mame became more than she could bear, "You—you make one feel indescribably mean."

It was perfectly true. She undoubtedly did, the lit-

tle go-getter. Under all the surface crudity, which month by month was ceasing to be anything like as crude as it had been, was something big, vital, true.

Lady Violet was not given to self-depreciation. She knew her power of displacement only too well, even in the queer muss of a modern world. She might have been tempted to laugh at this rather pathetic thing; she might have played her off successfully against certain pretentious people, yet somehow the minx was riding off with all the honours. Mame already had taught her a pretty sharp lesson. It was one she would never forget. Lady Violet for the future would always remember that the player of unlawful games must keep an eye on the policeman. And now Mame was teaching her something else.

Seldom had this woman of the world found herself quite so much at a loss. Face to face with Mame's heroism, for her self-sacrifice amounted to that, mere words became an impertinence. The thing to strike her about this good child when she set eyes on her first was the extraordinary grit that was in her; and it was that quality which spoke to her now.

Abruptly she forced a laugh to keep herself from tears. "My dear, you make one feel like thirty cents."

It was one of the choicest phrases of the little go-getter, one among the many that had appealed to her friend. Somehow that phrase seemed to save the situation. Yet not altogether.

"I guess you don't, honey." Mame spoke bitterly. "And I guess you never will. You and your Mommer

and the friends and neighbours and that old house will see to that. I'm the one to feel like thirty cents."

The voice was so desolate that even Lady Violet, who did not care much for the practice, could not forbear from giving her a kiss. "I remember your saying that you had come over to pull the big stuff. Well, I rather think you've pulled it." And her friend laughed again to keep her courage up.

"I didn't come to pull this sort of stuff." Mame snorted as she brushed her eyes fiercely. "I've gone cuckoo. And to-morrow I'll think so."

"One has to go cuckoo, as you call it, hasn't one, to do the things worth doing? I could no more have let go that foolish bird, had I been you, than I could have jumped over the moon."

"No, I guess not. And even now, if you don't want to lose him you had better watch the cage."

"How can we help you to keep your little paws off the foolish creature?"

"By not letting me see him again." Mame was stoical. As she spoke she wrapped up the box containing the ring and the letter she had written in a piece of brown paper; and then applied red sealing wax. "And if you are wise you'll just see that he gets married pretty soon to—to—" Even her bravery was not quite equal to the task of pronouncing the hated name. "I think I'll go to the post office and send this back in a registered parcel."

She quitted the room abruptly, leaving her friend to some very sharp-edged thoughts.

XLIX

THE days that followed were dark and difficult for Mame. Nor did Lady Violet find them particularly easy. At heart she was kindly and honest and she could not help fixing upon herself a good deal of the blame for what had occurred. She it was who had introduced this little marauder; she had been wilfully and stupidly blind to the consequences; and her only excuse was that not for a moment could she believe that Bill would be so weak. Yet she had deliberately thrown them together. She had bestowed upon Mame a spurious eligibility. This bitterly humiliating business was an object lesson in the sheer folly of playing the fool.

It was decidedly painful all round. First of all, poor Mame really suffered. The part she had undertaken to play was superhumanly big. Very few girls could have gone back in that way on their whole philosophy of life; and to Violet's good heart it was hateful to have to ask her to do it. She must have loved Bill, perhaps as no other woman was likely to do, to nerve herself to a sacrifice so high.

Much diplomacy was called for in the days that followed. Bill could be a stubborn fellow. His family had always humoured his whims. It looked at first

as if there would be no handling him. Irresponsible, not to say flabby, as his nature was, had he had the wit to realise clearly that poor Mame had got a blow over the heart, he would not have taken the thing lying down.

Violet, hating intensely the rôle her own folly had doomed her to play, yet proved herself, when fairly put to it, a consummate tactician. Bill must not guess, must not come near guessing, how much this good and brave child really cared for him. He must be rather a "dud," his sister thought, not to see it for himself. Instinct ought to have told him how the little brick was steeling her heart. Even while Violet threw dust in his eyes with a subtlety and a success for which she loathed herself, she yet clung to the paradoxical view that had Bill been worthy of Mame he would have been less obtuse. "She can't bear your losing the Towers and giving up the Army." That phrase was Violet's strongest weapon. It admitted two interpretations and his sister was not in the least proud of Bill when he allowed it to suggest the wrong one. "Of course she considers the gilt will be off the gingerbread." That was Machiavellian. The end seemed to justify the means; at any rate Violet had so persuaded herself; but it really was rather low down. And she could not, womanlike, help resenting Bill's denseness and lack of character which made the unpleasant task of throwing dust in his eyes so much less difficult than it ought to have been.

The weeks went by and Mame set herself stoically to

forget. There was pride in her as well as grit. She was determined to stand up to life and make something of the mighty difficult business of living it. To stanch her wounds she threw herself into her work with new ardour. Back of everything was rare common sense. She must have the strength to bear the self-inflicted blow without flinching.

One morning, however, just before Christmas, an incident occurred that reopened the closing wounds. Mame and Celimene were discussing the make-up of the weekly cable to New York, when Celimene said with an odd change of tone, "There's one bit of news that may not be without interest on the other side. It's not yet announced, so we shall be the first in the field."

"What is the news?" asked Mame keenly. Her flair for a choice tit-bit was not less than of yore.

"A marriage has been arranged, the date of which will be shortly announced, between the Marquis of Kidderminster and Gwendolen, the only child of Giles Childwick, Esquire, and Mrs. Childwick, formerly of Treville, New Jersey."

"Oh!" Mame gave a little gasp. Celimene saw her turn very white.

"We are none of us worthy of you, my dear. In the end you'll find yourself well rid of people like us." Violet's tone had a note of pain that for her was something new. Life had not been exactly a bed of roses lately. She had discovered, a little late in the day perhaps, that she had a conscience. A share of the hurt she was inflicting had to be borne by herself.

When Mame was able to speak she said: "You'd have been good enough for me. I like you all. You are some of the nicest folks I've met." The whimsical frankness of this good child brought back the laugh, if not too readily, to the worldly wise Violet. What a piece of luck, they both had a sense of humour!

"We owe you more than perhaps you realise." Violet did not find the words easy, but they had to be said. "You showed how terribly dangerous was delay as far as that brother of mine is concerned. He might have been snapped up by some pretty little prowler, with a nice taste in dicky birds, who short of death and destruction could never have been persuaded to unclasp her claws."

"That's so," assented Mame. "And you're wise to have hustled on that marriage." And then whimsically, to ease the aching of her heart: "Some other little cat might have got that bird."

She was so real and so true, this brave child, that Violet felt she would like to have taken her in her arms and hugged her. "My mother and I both realise that you have done a big thing. She has sent you all sorts of kind messages. We are going to see that Gwendolen plays the game so far as you are concerned. And no matter how long you stay over here you will always have friends."

"Gwendolen will make him a good wife."

"Yes, she will. She is a very sensible girl, with a strong will. I am sure she will keep him on the rails. And she really cares for him."

"Perhaps he'll get to care for her after a while."

"I think he may. Gwendolen is a very good sort. But I'm afraid Bill's feelings don't run deep." And the note of pain crept again into the voice of his sister.

L

THE marriage ceremony was fixed for the second week of the new year. All London was invited. The Childwicks liked to do things well, and however well they did them made no impact on their wealth. They were really rich people and of late years their stock had been going continually up.

Still it was generally felt that Gwendolen had done very well. She was a cut and polished jewel, but a setting was needed for her. What choicer setting could mortal girl desire than an old and distinguished marquisate and that beautiful and historical place Warlington Towers? These things would supply the essential background her millions lacked. Then, too, Bill was a popular young man. His feelings, as his sister said, might not run deep, but in his way he was immensely attractive. Everybody liked Bill. Even his fecklessness was a point in his favour. And he would be all the better for having a shrewd and clever American wife to keep him up to the mark.

Mame received an invitation from the Childwicks; her friends saw to that. It was duly accepted; yet when the day came she did not feel equal to facing the music. Lady Violet did her best to persuade her to come to the church and to the reception in Berkeley

Square, until she realised that it would not be kind to persist. Good, brave little puss! Those quaint furry paws had been rather nastily trapped. She was still suffering. For all her wonderful grit, when the day came she could not help groaning a bit over the throbbing of her wounds.

It went to Lady Violet's heart to leave her behind. But there was no help for it. The child could not face the music. And it was hardly reasonable to expect that she should.

Even as Lady Violet stood in her regalia, which emphasised her fine points, and took a tender and affectionate leave of poor Mame, she could not help saying in her frank way: "I'm not going to enjoy this one bit. We're shown up too badly. I wish now I hadn't interfered."

It was no more than the truth. She felt on a low plane. Compared with her friend and business partner she had a sense of inferiority which was new and decidedly unwelcome.

"You were quite right, honey." Mame was brave and magnanimous to the end. "Had I been you I'd just have done that. It's nature. And it's no use trying to go against nature."

But Mame's eyes were so tragic, that her friend, without venturing to say another word, made a sort of bolt for the door and for the lift beyond it. No, Lady Violet did not feel that she was going to enjoy her day.

The day, for Mame, was very far from being one of

enjoyment either. A great deal of it was spent walking about London. Now the pinch had really come it was the go-getter who mounted to the saddle and took command. The practical side of a dual nature was not slow to inform her that she had gone back on herself. She had betrayed, at the beck of a mere whim, all that she had stood for.

Life had always been against her until a few months ago. She had had to fight so hard for bare existence that she might at least have had the sense to ensure the future when opportunity arose. But no, she had denied her luck. There was a Tide. Well, the Tide had come and she had deliberately ignored it. A great position, social security had been offered her. She had even accepted her chance and then, just for a whim, had passed it on to her enemy and rival.

The go-getter spared her nothing. It had a royal time. She had been a fool. The lot of the fool was suffering. "You've broken a paw, honey. Always you'll be a little mucker now. You'll never be able to fix on anything again. No more will you be able to mark down your bird and fly at it. You'll be unsettled for the rest of your days. Not always will you be brisk and quick; your looks, such as they are, and they've never been much to bank on, honey, are going already. These folks in London, England, who mocked at you and pulled your leg, you could have handed them a haymaker. But no, you must get fanciful and high-falutin."

Yes, the go-getter with the sardonic voice and a flow

of rather second-rate conversation had a royal time. He spared her nothing. She was unworthy of herself, of her breed, of her clan. Idealism. The hearty fellow landed his simp of a partner a blow on the point. If some of these honest-to-God Americans didn't watch out, Idealism was going to be their ruin. You didn't catch the dyed-in-the-wool Britisher playing around with flams of that kind. He was a pretty successful merchant, the Britisher, but he was content to leave idealism to other people. As a business man he was a model for the world. And why? Because with all his lip service he knew how to keep the soft stuff apart from the hard.

Poor Mame! She trudged half the day about the streets of a hostile city. With that pressure upon her spirit it was impossible to stay quiet indoors. Her very soul seemed to ache. Every syllable was true that was whispered in her overwrought ear. She had gone back on all she had ever stood for. They had put one over on her, these hard-roed Britishers. Yes, she must be cuckoo. You came over to pull big stuff, whispered the relentless voice. And by cripes, Mame Durrance, you've pulled it!

Tired out at last with tramping the West End parks and squares, she took a little food in a restaurant in a by-street of Soho. There she was likely to meet no one she knew. She was not in a mood to face her kind. As she ate her soup a nostalgia came upon her. After all, she was in a strange land, an alien. Their ways were not her ways; they had a different viewpoint; their

method of doing things was not the same. She began to long for the sight and the sound of the homely, hearty, warm-blooded folks she had known; the folks who spoke the same language as herself, in the curious drawl that lately she had been taking such pains to get rid of.

Her thoughts went back to the land where she belonged. In the bitterest hour she had known since she had started out from her home town to see life, she had a craving for the friendly easy-goingness of her own kind. She had crowded a lot of experience into her European pilgrimage; in certain ways her luck had been truly remarkable. Mame Durrance had made good at her job; but this evening with a very large size "black monkey" upon her, she had a sudden yearning for the larger and freer air of her native continent.

Miserably unhappy she returned to the flat about nine o'clock. Lady Violet had been home from the revels, had inquired for her anxiously, but had changed her dress and gone out to dinner. Evidently she was making a day of it. Mame was not sorry. She had no wish to be caught in this mood. Yet she had no desire for bed. She would not be able to sleep if she turned in. The ache in her heart was terrible. If she could not learn to subdue it, for the first time in her life she would be driven to take a drug.

Suddenly her eye lit on a package on the writing table. It bore the label of a New York publisher and was addressed to herself. Perfunctorily she tore off the wrapper. A novel in a gay jacket was revealed.

It was called *Prairie City*; and the name of the author was Elmer Pell Dobree.

Mame's heart leaped. Coincidence has an arm notoriously long, but nothing could have been more timely than the arrival of this book. Her thoughts rushed back to the source of its being. And as if to speed them on their way, a letter had been enclosed in the parcel.

Characteristically it ran:

Dear Mame,

You are such a girl now, among your slick friends in London, and you are pulling such big stuff with your weekly columnising, that I daresay you have forgotten your obscure Cowbarn epoch, and the junk whose early chapters you had the honour (sic) of typing for your first and most distinguished (sic) editor, with which the boob filled in his spare hours. You used to tell him how good these opening chapters were and the boob used to believe you. The consequence is . . . well, this is the consequence. By the way, it was clever you that invented the title, after we had shaken a leg—and you were always some dancer—at that dive at the top of Second Street, one wet afternoon.

Well, Mame, that title was lucky. *Prairie City* has made good. It has, if I may say it modestly, made quite surprisingly good. 'Tis hardly six weeks since it was first issued here by Allardyce, Inc., but already it's gone big. Early next month their London house will publish it, and if it can repeat in England what it has done in New York, the undersigned Elmer Pell Dobree is a permanent whale. So go to it, Mame, you little go-getter. Corral the big

drum and get around the comic town of your adoption—worse luck!—and see if for the sake of old times—good times they were, too, I'll tell the world—you can't put one over, in the name of an old friend, on the doggone Britisher.

P. S. When do we see you again here? As I've told you more than once, this continent is a poorer place for your absence. If you've left us for keeps it's a great, great shame; and there's one young man who won't forgive you.

When, at a decidedly late hour, or, rather, an early one, Lady Violet returned from the festivities, she invaded Mame's bedroom. She wanted to see if the child had come back and that she was all right. In spite of the excitements of the day her thoughts had been pretty constantly with her little friend. She was a good deal concerned about Mame. And now it was something of a relief to find her propped up in bed, simply devouring a book with a red cover.

It was so good to see a smile on a countenance which a few hours ago looked as if it would never smile again, that the intruder exclaimed, "Why, why, whatever have you there?"

"Elmer's written a book." A glow of excitement was in Mame's tone and in her eyes. "It's all about Cowbarn and the folks we used to know."

"True to life, I hope." Mame's friend, gazing at her furtively, sought to read what lay behind that rather hectic air.

"Better than life ever was or ever will be. It just

gets you feeling good. And it keeps you feeling good all the time."

"He must be a clever man, your friend Elmer P."

"Clever is not the name for Elmer." Mame spoke excitedly. "A genius—that baby! All the Cowbarn folks are in it. I'm in it. And I'll say he's let me down light."

"I hope he's made you the heroine of the piece. Anyhow, he ought to have. You are fit to be the heroine of the best piece ever written."

"Say now, honey," expostulated Mame in the way her friend had learned to love, "that's where you get off. Heroine-ism and that fancy jake is no use to me. I'll never be able to get away with it. But Elmer has let me down light."

"You must let me read it."

Mame laughed. She actually laughed. "Why, you shall so. It's the goods. That boy has an eye to him. He can see into things. And he knows a lot about human nature, does that boy."

Already Lady Violet was feeling a lively sense of gratitude towards the famous and legendary Elmer P. The poor child was transformed. Her own people, for whose homely and abounding kindliness she had in her misery been longing, were alive in those magic pages. Yes, they were alive and they were dancing, Mame declared. And half America was dancing with them.

The mirth of the simple creatures she loved so well had lifted a weight from her heart. The relief might

only be temporary, but Lady Violet was very willing to do homage to the wizardry of Elmer P.

"There's his letter." Mame tossed it excitedly across the bright green expanse of counterpane.

Lady Violet read with a smile. And then suddenly there came a mischievous little clutch at her heart. Yes, why not? It was an idea. The brilliantly clever woman of the world again glanced furtively at Mame. This intoxicating moment, which was doing so much to heal the child and to keep her sane, must, if possible, be held. But how? Like all things in time it was fleeting, transitory. With the coming of daylight it would surely pass. A pitiless January dawn would throw her back upon hard and cruel reality. Yet this moment of happiness might be extended; perhaps there was a chance of making it permanent.

She fixed her wise eyes upon those of the feverish Mame. "Yes, my dear, we'll go round with the big drum. We'll corral the Press all right. If *Prairie City* doesn't knock London endways it shall not be our fault."

"You can bet your life it won't be!"

"Well, write to-morrow and tell him so."

"I will."

"And tell him, my dear, in a postscript, strongly underlined, that if he will do the one thing you ask you'll guarantee the success of *Prairie City* this side the Atlantic."

Mame was all ears. "What's that, honey?"

"He must come over himself as soon as ever he can.

We'll promise the very best that can be done for him in the way of a good time. After all there is no advertisement for a book quite equal to the person who wrote it."

Mame gave a chuckle of pleasure. Sure, it was an idea. Why had not she thought of it herself?

"Yes, hon, if Elmer comes that'll fix it."

But would he come? That stern question at once invaded Mame's mind.

"We'll make him," said Lady Violet.

"He's not easy to make do anything he don't want to. And he's pretty busy these days and rather important, too."

"We'll get at him somehow." Lady Violet had an arch look. "For his own sweet sake," she added artfully.

LI

THE next day they laid their clever heads together and wrote a letter to Elmer P. It was appreciative but peremptory. He must mail his latest photograph at once. And he had better send that old green album, too, with all those snapshots in it of Cowbarn, Iowa, including some interesting views of the exterior and the interior of the office building of the good old *Independent.*

Mame gave a solemn undertaking to get out the big drum and to go around with it. She and her friends, in fact, would organise such a publicity campaign as would astonish even a booster like himself. But he, too, must be ready to do his bit. By the time London had the book in its hands, it would be dying to see the author. He must come over, if only for a week, he must, he must! That final imperative word was three times underscored.

The thirteen days that followed the letter's posting were rather anxious ones. Lady Violet feared that when Mame's excitement had time to cool a bad reaction would set in. By judicious fanning, however, she was able to keep the flame alive; sufficiently, at any rate, to provide a highly necessary distraction.

Elmer's reply came promptly. The urgent skill of

the summons had at least stirred him to that. Moreover, in the pompous language of the British House of Go-getters, which Mame had heard for herself from the Ladies' Gallery, the answer was in the affirmative. The great man actually promised to come to London. His coming, moreover, should synchronise with the British publication of his book, which since he wrote last had sold three more editions in these United States.

"He doesn't let the grass grow!" Mame crowed her triumph. It was disinterested triumph. She had nothing to gain, as far as she knew, by the coming of Elmer, except in the way of humble-minded ministry to his rapidly growing fame. "One of the up-and-coming ones is Elmer, for all he's so quiet. Tell me, Vi, what do you think of his photograph?"

"Is it like him?"

"He's changed some, I'll say, since I left him in the editor's office at Cowbarn, twenty months ago to-morrow."

"A clever face." A good face, too, Lady Violet might have added. She certainly saw something oddly attractive in the fair, open countenance of Elmer P.

"I guess there's something better than clever in it." Mame gazed critically at the photograph.

"Well, dear child, I guess there is, too."

Her friend looked at her tenderly and then laughed to herself softly.

LII

THEY lost no time in getting to work. First they went to Henrietta Street and called upon Allardyce, Inc. Taking wise men into their counsels, they started to plan a campaign whose aim was the making of Elmer Pell Dobree a household name in Britain. They infected Allardyce, Inc., with their own enthusiasm; not perhaps such a difficult process. Every mail was bringing news of breaking records across the water. *Prairie City* was the best in its kind since Mark Twain. Indeed some of the highbrows thought really and truly it was better.

The publishers were taken with Mame. All the natural zip of the booster-born sprang to the surface as she lightly gave off her ideas for the big drum. Very bright some of these ideas were. There was one in particular which appealed to these shrewd men. Unfortunately, to carry it out would cost money. But as smart Miss Amethyst Du Rance, a writer herself, by the way, declared, quoting from a favourite calendar that had once adorned the wall at the back of her typewriter in that identical office which soon would be famous over the breadth of two continents, If you want to make Omelettes you've got to break Eggs.

This boom was going to cost money. No use burk-

ing that fact in political economy. But it was going to be worth it. Lady Violet Treherne—that very distinguished-looking girl who had accompanied the corking little Miss Du Rance into the back parlour: Celimene, by the way, of the *Morning News*—was of that opinion, too. *Prairie City* was the goods. It was the big stuff. Every dime spent on boosting it would earn a dollar.

Allardyce, Inc., of the Allardyce Building, East Forty-ninth Street, New York City, U.S.A., and 1-a Henrietta Street, London, England, not to mention 16 Rue de la Paix, Paris, France; 39 Stratton Street, Johannesburg, S.A., and 105 Victoria Avenue, Melbourne, Australia; in short, wherever the honest mother tongue is spoken, Allardyce, Inc., decided to fall for Miss Du Rance and her little campaign. Still it was going to cost money.

"It'll be worth it all the time." The air of Miss Du Rance was already victorious. "You do your bit and we'll do ours. That's all we ask."

The head of the London branch of the well-known firm personally bowed the two ladies into their taxi. He had not been so impressed in years. Full of vim this Miss Du Rance. Portentously full of pep. No wonder they made good in cradle-rocking Britain, when they came over, these one-hundred-per-cent little ladies from the U.S. And the cunning minx kept back a few grains of the pep for her final shot. As she offered a hand in parting, at its most fashionable angle, to Allardyce, Inc., she said in her new and careful Mayfair

manner: "When Elmer Pell Dobree arrives in this country, Lady Violet Treherne will give a luncheon for him at the Savoy Hotel. All the most worth-while folks in London will be invited to meet him. I tell you, sir, although you mustn't tell the world just now, she has already arranged with her friend the Prime Minister, if he happens to be disengaged at the mo-ment, to attend the gathering and to give an ad-dress on the Value of Literary Art in International Relations."

They left Allardyce, Inc., balanced on the extreme edge of the kerb of Henrietta Street, staring after their departing chariot. As they drove off to luncheon at the Ladies Imperium, Lady Violet said, "My child, I rather think you've clicked."

Mame felt rather that she had. The happy feeling was confirmed, moreover, a little later in the week when a second letter from Elmer P. was delivered in Half Moon Street. In it, that now famous man positively undertook to be at the Savoy Hotel on February 10, always providing the *Olympic* in which he had booked a passage came in on time. He hoped to stay a fort-night in London. But that, he feared, must be his limit. For just now he was living a forty-eight-hour day in New York.

"You can bet your life that's so," was Mame's ap-proving comment.

LIII

ELMER came and saw London, England. And the ancient burg gave him a real good time. He went here, there and everywhere; his photograph was in all the papers; columns were written about his book. There was a brilliant luncheon at the Savoy. Lady Violet kept her promise. Big-wigs attended it, including her father's old friend the Prime Minister, who seized the occasion to deliver a most significant address on the Value, Etc., which was cabled verbatim all over the English-speaking world.

No young author, since the art of writing was invented, ever had a more generous reception in the great metropolis. A modest, rather shy, young man, he was inclined at first to be overwhelmed by it. But the undefeated Mame, who met him at Euston, who took him to his hotel, who gave him continual advice, saw to it that he wasn't. For the honour of Cowbarn, Iowa, he must stand right up to his job. It was her task to see that he did so without flinching and she duly performed it. She mothered him through receptions and tea parties; she toted him around; and the bewildered and breathless Elmer hardly knew whether to be more impressed by the storm his coming had aroused or by the manner in which Mame rode it.

Nothing in the whole of London astonished him quite so much as Mame's transformation from her chrysalis Cowbarn period. Her clothes, her style, her English accent fairly tickled him to death. Then the friends she had made! She appeared to hob-nob with half the swells in Britain and to have them feeding from the hand.

Elmer had many surprises in these crowded and glorious days. But, shrewd and cool American citizen that he was, he managed to keep a perfectly level head. For the life of him he couldn't imagine what all the fuss was about; or at least if he had an inkling of the reason for it, he could not understand how Mame had contrived it all. She had evidently had the luck to strike some very powerful backers.

Even before landing in England, he had surmised that such was the case. The mysterious Celimene, of the weekly news-letter, had proved to be so highly informed in social matters that her value had been clearly demonstrated in New York. Her name had been given him in confidence before he came over; and he was mighty keen to meet her.

They might be said to challenge each other's curiosity. But their meeting not only fulfilled their hopes of one another; it was the beginning of a friendship. One could not help liking the author of *Prairie City*. He was a well-set-up young man; and behind the dry shrewdness and the determination to get there, qualities characteristic of Mame herself, were genuine kindliness and modesty. His rise to fame had been less

sudden than it seemed. It had been prepared for and earned. He owned to thirty-one years of life. They had not been easy years, but they had made him the man he was.

Lady Violet was glad that Elmer answered fully to Mame's description of him as "a regular fellow." There was something about him that inspired confidence. Whether it was a certain slowness of speech which implied depth of mind, a vein of real grit, or the charming air of diffidence with which he wore the fame that so deservedly was his, she instinctively felt that here was what Mame called a he-man.

This was well. She had a plan in that sagacious mind of hers. But the carrying out of it depended upon Elmer P. himself. Unless he could pass the test, and a pretty severe one, that a thorough woman of the world felt bound to impose, the fine scheme was doomed from the outset. His bearing, however, in those crowded days in which they saw a good deal of each other, convinced this friend that rumour had not overpainted him. Undoubtedly the young man deserved the position his talents had won. Beneath a surface a little stiff and formal at first, and, the critic thought, none the worse for that, was a warmth of heart and a balance of nature which enabled him to pass his examination with flying colours.

As much time as Elmer could spare from his exceedingly numerous engagements was devoted to Half Moon Street. From the first afternoon he went there to drink tea, with reviewers and people of influence in

the world of letters, he took a great liking to the place. For one thing he was made to feel so much at home. The presence of Mame guaranteed that. She was quite unspoiled in spite of the English accent, which to Elmer's secret delight was apt to wear a little thin in places. He was no end of an observer, the author of *Prairie City*. Back in the Cowbarn days there was something in Mame that had appealed to him; and in this new orientation she was still the Mame he had liked, smiled at just a little, and yet admired. Wonderful how she had been able to get away with it; yet he was not really surprised. He had always known that his little stenographer had a lot in her.

Everybody was so friendly in Half Moon Street. They seemed to take quite a personal pride in his success; they seemed to treat it almost as a part of their own. During the hours he spent there Mame and her friend Lady Violet were always devising fresh schemes for *Prairie City*. The boom was growing daily. But it must get bigger and bigger. Had he been their own brother they could not have done more.

One afternoon, when Elmer had been in London a week, he came rather early and happened to catch Lady Violet alone. Mame had gone, at the call of duty, to the première of a new play. In this rather providential absence, which yet did not owe quite so much to providence as appeared on the surface, Lady Violet seized the chance to have a private talk.

"So you are leaving us a week to-day?"

Elmer confessed that was his intention.

"If you find us all as complacent as our perfectly absurd newspapers you won't be sorry."

Elmer had the tact to ignore the vexed question of the British newspaper. "I'll be sorry enough," he said with simple sincerity. "You are just giving me the time of my life."

"Your book is so delightful. Every fresh reader is one friend more for the man who has written it." Lady Violet yielded to none in point of tact. Over that course few could live with her. "But I do hope you realise," she went laughingly on, "that, although you are your own best asset, as of course every true author has to be, you have also had a very clever and enthusiastic friend to pull the strings over here."

Elmer realised that.

"One doesn't say your success might not have been as great without her; but it could hardly have come so soon."

Yes, Elmer was sure.

"The way that dear child has worked for you has simply been splendid. Had she written the book herself, I don't think she could have been prouder of it. She literally bullied your publishers into boosting you —you know what even the best publishers are!—she bullied me into corralling the Prime Minister—it was a rare bit of luck getting him to come and make that speech—and it was her idea, wasn't it, that you should come over here and let us see you?"

Elmer felt all this was true. But gallantly he wanted

to include Lady Violet herself in the big bill of his gratitude.

"Please keep it all for Mame. That good child deserves every bit. She has worked for you like a demon. As good as gold, as true as steel. And she is quite cast down that you are leaving us next week."

Unluckily there was no help for it. But Elmer P., like most people of true genius, was simple at heart. He responded to the piping. Mame Durrance—in the mouth of her former employer the accent fell upon the first syllable of her surname rather than upon the second—deserved all the luck there was in the world. She was as real as they made them; and she was able to think of others.

Lady Violet drove that right home. "I, of all people, have reason to know it. She is capable of big things, that dear child. Some day, when you come and see us again, as of course you will, I may tell you a little story about her."

Elmer could not help a feeling of subtle flattery. It is difficult for rising young men to resist such a feeling when they find themselves tête-à-tête with an accomplished woman of the world. Lady Violet was quite as intriguing as any of the Fifth Avenue queens, with one or two of whom he was beginning to get acquainted. Mame had had amazing luck to put herself in so solid with this fascinating woman. It was true that Elmer personally owed a lot to Mame, a peerless little go-getter, but it was also true that Mame for her part owed much to this brilliant daughter of a famous states-

man who in his day had done a great deal for the English-speaking world.

The clock ticked pleasantly on to five o'clock and then quite as pleasantly to 5:15. But no Mame. Lady Violet feigned surprise. Then she glanced at an imposing array of cards on the chimneypiece. Oh, yes, she remembered! This was the at-home day of the wife of an influential editor. Mame had evidently kept it in mind even if Lady Violet herself had forgotten. "She's gone there to boost *Prairie City,*" said her friend with a smile. "Wherever she goes now she boosts *Prairie City;* and at night she boosts it in her dreams."

A quarter past five already! Elmer Pell Dobree rose with a start. At 5:30—Lady Violet must really excuse him—he was due in Aldwych to orate to the Journalists' Circle on the Coming of the American Novel. He was sorry to go, but Mame had fixed that on him at about twelve hours' notice, and as his good fairy declared it would mean another edition, he supposed he must stand up, a hero, and face it.

"You must." Lady Violet had what Elmer privately described as a Gioconda smile. Here was guile, here was subtlety or the author of *Prairie City* was not a judge of such matters. How intriguing she was. Gee! she had a power of making your blood course quicker.

"I've one favour to ask, Lady Violet." Elmer was moving to the door. "Can you and Mame spare tomorrow evening to dine with me quietly at the Savoy?"

Lady Violet took up a little red book from the writing table. A glance revealed that by the courtesy of

providence to-morrow night was free. She could not answer for Mame, but to the best of her recollection there was reason to think the little go-getter would not be in action that evening.

So then it was arranged, a little dinner, just the three of them, for the next evening, which was so providentially free, at the convenient hour of eight. Unless, of course, Mame, which somehow Lady Violet felt was hardly likely, telephoned him to the contrary.

LIV

THE little dinner was capital. In every small but considered detail it could not have been nicer. Elmer P., as the world looks for in one of his eminence, was growing to be a judge of food and wine. Also the shrewd dog knew how to choose his company. On his right sat Lady Violet, on his left was Mame. Over and beyond this pair of friends and boosters was vacancy, the limitless inane, at least so far as those three minds were concerned, although at other tables sat persons not without importance in their way.

In return for delicate food and dry champagne Elmer received high entertainment from the lively tongues of his charming guests. Both were observers of the human comedy, yet they observed it in the right way. There was nothing in their talk that was spiteful or backstairs, or beneath the dignity of human nature. Their aptness, wit, and general information, their opinions upon books, plays, music and the world at large gave the host a mental punch from the *hors d'œuvres* to the comice pear and the *crème de menthe,* for which crude liqueur both ladies confessed a partiality.

Elmer had had his triumphs, in the last week or so particularly, but frankly he doubted whether he had ever enjoyed a meal like this. It was so gay. And

there was the glamour of new experience. His life had suddenly been touched to newer and finer issues.

When the coffee appeared, at the end of the meal, Lady Violet drank hers quickly. Then quite unexpectedly she rose. She would have to fly. There was a musical party she had promised to attend. A stupid affair, but it was the call of duty.

Mame and Elmer were pressing in their entreaties for their amusing friend to remain, but she was not to be seduced from the true path. Besides, as she laughingly said, it was a perfect night of stars. And this being a sufficiently rare occurrence for London, she hoped that Elmer—if she might use his Christian name? —would walk with Mame through Trafalgar Square, along Pall Mall, up the Haymarket, across the Circus and down the full length of Piccadilly. She ventured to prescribe that route, because a little bird had whispered that if Elmer duly followed it he might look for a very pleasant surprise, for which Mame was alone responsible.

This was all so enigmatic that Elmer might have been tempted to disbelieve Lady Violet. But he knew she was no trifler. Emphatically she was one of the people who did not make promises unless they were able to deliver the goods.

"We'll go along and try it, anyway," conceded Elmer the polite. And being something of an altruist into the bargain: "But you'll come with us, won't you? We can't lose *you!*"

Lady Violet's refusal was amusingly definite. She

was late already; she must fly. Besides, there was an even more cogent reason. That, however, she was careful not to disclose to Elmer P. Dobree. As that *homme du monde* moved a bit ahead of her to the restaurant door to see her into her cloak and her taxi, she bent to Mame's ear and whispered urgently, "My child, if you don't put one over on him to-night I'll never speak to you again."

LV

ABLITHE twenty minutes or so after Lady Violet had "flown," Elmer and Mame decided to get a move on. For one thing Elmer's curiosity had been tremendously piqued by the surprise that had been predicted. What could it be? Lady Violet, he supposed, was just pulling his leg. Yet he didn't think so really; he knew she was not the kind of person to break a solemn promise. Still there was nothing to deduce from the attitude of Mame. The aider and abettor of Lady Violet was giving nothing away. The stars were very bright, the air for the time of year quite balmy, the pavements of London were dry as a bone. All the conditions, therefore, were favourable for outdoor exercise. Indeed, as Elmer said, or it may have been Mame who said it, the evening was just ideal for the purpose.

Mame put on her lovely new cloak trimmed with fur, or at least Elmer put it on for her. Then Elmer got into his overcoat and clapped on his smart gibus, which gave him such a look of distinction, that a loafer cadging for pence just beyond the courtyard of the hotel promptly addressed him as Captain.

The mutt got the coppers all right. It was not so much that Elmer was susceptible to that kind of flat-

tery, as that just now he was not in a mood to refuse anything to anybody. He was moving about this evening in an enchanted world.

At every step they took in it now, the world through which they were moving seemed to grow more entrancing. For one thing there was a powerful magic in the stars. The strip of moon, too, as Mame remarked, seemed to be trying to put one over on them. She made this observation while they were in the act of steering each other across the perilous vortex from Northumberland Avenue to Morley's Hotel, and nearly barging into more than one of their compatriots in the process.

However, they crossed in safety. Then they crossed again by the National Gallery and sauntered gaily along until they came to that great landmark in Mame's adventurous life, the Carlton Hotel. She gave a long look at it as they went by. Even on this night of marvels she could not pass that consecrated spot without a sense of amazement and gratitude.

They turned up by the Haymarket, according to plan, and then slowly rounded the corner into Piccadilly Circus. And then it was in this identical moment that the goods were delivered in the most unexpected and convincing way. The surprise that had been solemnly promised Elmer appeared right before his eyes.

A flaming electric sign winked letter by letter from the starlit sky.

PRAIRIE CITY

BY ELMER PELL DOBREE

The Book
All the World
Is Reading

"Gee!" gasped Elmer. The secret had been carefully kept; he had not an inkling! A surprise indeed, a masterpiece of boosting.

Mame's voice rose in triumph. "Say, listen, Elmer. I'll tell the world this is where we put one over on London, England."

Down Piccadilly they walked on air. No word passed. But to keep in touch with himself and the mundane realities Elmer took Mame's hand. These were sublime moments. Suddenly, high above the famous street, the sign flamed out again.

"Say, listen, Mame," began Elmer hoarsely. But even with all his genius to help him he did not know how to end, so he merely squeezed her hand.

The dear little go-getter, how slick she was! But she was also something much better than slick. She was fine and true. A minute they stood gazing at the recurring sign in all its brilliancy and then, life being too wonderful to stand still in it, they moved on hand in hand.

Sure it was destiny they should be walking thus, four thousand miles, four thousand solid miles, from the dear funny old spot in which they had walked last.

If only Cowbarn, Iowa, could see that sign. The book all the world was reading; the book that had immortalised the Folks. Would they recognise themselves in all their humour and their quiddity?

When speech was possible between them, which was not until they were near the precincts of the Ritz, it was Mame who dared. "Elmer," her voice was very soft, "I'm feeling pretty good about our book." She said "our book." "There's not one word we'll ever have to wish away. The folks aren't saints, the folks aren't, but there ain't a line that's mean. There's nothing to make 'em sorry. Some of the stories you might have told you didn't tell. Some of the things you might have said you didn't say. Elmer, I'm feeling pretty good about that book."

Elmer, too, was feeling pretty good. In fact so good was Elmer feeling, that for all he was fully launched in the realm of letters, he still couldn't find a word. Not one word. But like all young men of force and originality he enjoyed a certain power of action. Quite suddenly, without premeditation, he put one over on Mame. In the dark shadow cast by the Ritz arcade, he kissed the little go-getter.

Mame was thrilled by the sheer audacity of the assault. But there was the authority of the book all the world was reading that the heart of woman is a queer thing; so she just didn't mind at all. However, she did not speak again, until hand in hand they had convoyed each other past a line of pirates in the guise of taxi cabmen, whom the law allows to range themselves

in a row opposite Devonshire House. Nay, she didn't speak until they had passed the end of Half Moon Street, the other side of the road, and on by the railings of the Green Park.

It was when they halted to gaze at the bright windows of the Ladies Imperium that Mame's soft voice was heard.

"That's the hen club I belong to."

Elmer was impressed.

"It's the Chickest hen club in London."

Elmer guessed it was.

"Cocks are not admitted. If they was,"—Mame said was, yet she knew perfectly well it wasn't grammar,—"I'd take you right in and buy you a cocktail."

This was a little too much for the author of *Prairie City*. Such un-American play upon words was the palpable fruit of mental stress, but in combination with the magic of the stars it was a little too much for Elmer P. Dobree.

"Now, then, Mame Durrance, can that." And then immediately opposite those flaming windows and in the lee of the park railings which hid them well, he kissed her again with rapturous violence.

After this stimulating episode they moved slowly along by the Green Park. They still walked hand in hand; even now it didn't seem safe to let go of each other. But when they came to the Quadriga, that symbol of victory significantly poised on the top of the park gates, which is much and justly admired, they stopped and gazed up.

They gazed up at the Quadriga by the royal light of the stars. Their hands were locked in each other's. The eternal verities caught them suddenly. Mighty, mighty forces were flowing through and over, through and over, this brief and transient, this pitifully brief and transient, life of man.

"Elmer!" It was Mame's voice, but hardly more than a whisper, it was so solemn and so hushed. "Imagine, Elmer, you and me—"

But Elmer said nothing. With a queer tightening of the breast he continued to gaze upwards to the symbol of victory on the top of the park gates.

(1)

THE END

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